

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

LIBRARY



18

18



18

18



18

18

18

18

18

18

18

18

18

18

18

18

This book is presented
to Hester Dowell Alistair Telfer
by his loving great-grandfather,
John Richard Howditch.
(Author of the book.)

As a mark of his appreciation of
Dowell's diligence and perseverance
as a school student.

Corinda, Portlisk. N.S.W.
21 September, 1901.



See Proverbs of Solomon;
3rd Chapter, 5th, 6th and 7th Verses.

rk's late part





CHAPTER I.

“An honest tale speeds best being plainly told.”

—*Shakespeare.*

SOME years ago, Benjamin Bruce worked in a London hat-box factory. But trade grew slack in his line after the great International Exhibition of 1862, for Britons pretty generally adopted the style of head coverings, as well as the cut of the beards, of their continental visitors, and the time-honoured Anglican tall hats were partially superseded by foreign novelties, of various sorts and shapes, some of which were not very becoming to British faces. That change in the current taste or fashion was a special misfortune to hat-box makers, for reasons which I need not stop to explain. Bruce and other steady workmen were put on short time in the factory, which meant reduced wages, and the comforts in many a humble home were sadly diminished.

Most persons know what worry is, though they cannot define its dismal, creepy nature any more intelligibly than they could describe the awakening twinges of soft corns or ear-ache. Some men, who are called “jolly fellows,” affect to scorn ordinary troubles, and will even laugh at threatening crises which make their thoughtful neighbours anxious, but there is not much confidence to be placed in the courage or the counsel of such jokers, if real distress should come. When Bruce had full work at his trade he was contented and cheerful, but when his

hands were unoccupied for three or four days in a week, he began to worry over it, and his whole system got out of order, like a wooden clock in a mouldy cellar. It was not natural for him to see himself drifting down the sluggish ebb of hard times into the vortex of poverty, without being concerned about it; and as his prospects of better times got more beclouded from day to day, he grew more dispirited, and life seemed to have become a troublesome load to him. That abnormal condition was rather puzzling to Bruce, for he had never even dreamt of dyspepsia; but when he grew experienced enough to trace the cause mainly to the abatement of daily labour, to which he had been long accustomed, the remedy seemed still beyond his reach, for he could not get full employment at his own handicraft, and to begin anew to learn some other trade was an expedient which did not seriously enter his mind.

Mr. Bruce, of whose subsequent history I have much to tell, was about twenty-four years of age. He had an open, pleasing expression of face, intelligent looking grey eyes, and an honest shaped head. In manner he was retiring, except to those who gained his esteem and confidence, when he was frank and unreserved, and his kindness was overflowing. He was truthful and trustworthy, and his habits were very steady. He had a tall, manly frame, which had never been weakened by ill-health or fast living. The master, with whom he learned his trade, was a strict man, and kept a watchful eye to the moral conduct of his apprentices, and to his other employes also as far as it was practicable. He gave them a good example as well as useful precepts. In his childhood, Ben—though not exactly a spoiled boy—was a pet with his mother and grandmother, and he was seldom out of their sight or influence, except in

school hours. Whether that was the best sort of training or a lad, who apparently would have to earn his living in a workshop, I shall not now consider, but it is not unlikely that overmuch petting or nursing tended to increase his natural sensitiveness. Such soft treatment has that effect sometimes on boys of a nervous temperament ; and they sadly miss their home coddling when they have to turn out into the world, amongst strangers.

Ben's mother was the only daughter of Widow Bruce, who kept a small grocery shop at Hackney, one of the eastern suburbs of London. Who his father was Ben did not know. He once, with a natural childish curiosity, asked "if he had a daddy, like Jemmy Drew?" but his grandmother solemnly warned him not to ask such a question again. His mother worked early and late with her needle, and kept him more genteelly clad than most of the boys who went to the parochial school with him, and she was otherwise tenderly careful of him. When he was about nine years of age his mother died, which was a sad bereavement for him. According to the parish doctor's report her death was caused by disease of the heart ; but some of the neighbours said she had worked and fretted herself to death, for she was never seen outside of her mother's house except on Sunday evenings when going to or returning from church, and they did not think she got fresh air enough to keep life in a tame pigeon. But it is not often that a poor girl can wholly please critical neighbours, whether she roams abroad or stays indoors. Ben continued to live with his grandmother, who kept him at school till he was fourteen years of age, and then she bound him apprentice to a hat-box maker. She chose that humble trade for him because it was light, dry work ; but Ben never had a fancy for it ; nevertheless, he was always

willing to please his grandmother, or to try to do so. After his term of apprenticeship expired he earned wages enough to keep himself comfortably, and to help his grandmother. But trade fell off, from causes before alluded to, and Ben was put upon less than half time at the factory, an event that he regarded as the beginning of his real troubles.

Next door to Grandmother Bruce lived Mrs. Timms, who had a pretty rosy-faced daughter, named Jenny. Ben had begun to fancy that he would like to have a wife and a home of his own—a notion common enough to spirited young men everywhere—and he thought that Jenny was the most suitable girl he had ever seen. He had no idea of marrying until his circumstances improved; but as Jenny was an attractive girl, he feared she might get engaged to some less tardy lover if he did not speak up in time. His acquaintance with her had been only of a neighbourly kind, still he had some season to hope that she would receive his addresses with favour, for signs in that way are easily understood. Before making love to Miss Jenny, however, he thought it was only right to acquaint his grandmother, and he did so one evening without a foreboding of the strong opposition the dear old lady would show to his tender project. But he soon found that she was as decidedly averse to it as if she were certain he was going to ruin himself outright, and she gave her reasons for her opposition in language very emphatic, if it was not convincing to her love-smitten grandson. She ended her protest by declaring that she would rather see him laid beside his poor mother in Hackney churchyard, than see him married into the Timms family.

"Stay, dear grandmother!" softly interposed Ben, who saw that the kind old lady was getting almost

hysterical. "Pray don't distress yourself about the affair. You never yet knew me to do anything that you disapproved of. I have not made love to Jenny, nor will I do so as you so much object. We will say no more about it."

That prompt concession soon smoothed down grandmother's ruffled spirit. She said he was a dutiful boy, as he always had been, and he deserved all the care that she had bestowed on him from his infancy. They parted at bed-time, with their usual embraces and good wishes. But though Ben had promised his grandmother to say no more about his love affair, he could not help thinking of it, and feeling too that her objection to his settling in life was unreasonable. He judged that her aversion to Jenny Timms arose from her excessive fondness for him, which would not suffer any one to share his affection with her, and he thought she would have shown the same jealous temper if he were to propose to any other girl in London or elsewhere. While arguing the case, his grandmother had incautiously asked him the pointed question, "How he meant to support a wife in a comfortable home, if he was not able to keep himself?" Those words galled him on a tender spot, and reminded him also that for six weeks past he had been encroaching on his grandmother's scanty means. It was true enough that he was not able to keep himself, so it was almost wicked presumption in him even to sigh for a wife. He lay for several hours tossing about in sleepless anxiety, and wishing he could see some honest way of earning a livelihood, although it were mere labourer's work of the hardest kind.

The following morning after breakfast, Ben kissed his grandmother before going out, and away he went in a very depressed mood. He knew there was no work

for him at the hat-box factory that week, so he strolled down to the London Docks hoping he might get a job of some sort to earn a few shillings. Soon after entering the dock gates, he saw a large ship being warped towards the outer basin, and the cheerful songs of the sailors, while walking round the capstan, seemed to operate like a charm on his troubled spirits, for he was fond of singing. He thought sailors must be the most enviable men in the world, for they were always merry or lively, as he had seen them (except when they were tipsy), and when once hired on board ship they could have no anxieties about being out of work for awhile. He did not think of the risks seamen always run of losing their ship by wreck or fire or collision, or other causes, and being suddenly thrown out of employment—perhaps on a foreign shore. His moody heart persuaded him that there was no class of men so poorly off as hat-box makers, and that it would be an advantage to him to change his occupation to any other honest one. All at once an idea struck him that it would be pleasant to live in a forecastle with a lot of shipmates, who were always singing or joking or telling funny stories, and he would be earning an honest livelihood without being a clog to his poor grandmother. He was weary of an idle life, and he would go to sea. Without taking even ten minutes to consider over his sudden whim, he climbed up the gangway of the ship, which was then close alongside the dock wall. It was the first time his feet had ever trodden a deck, and he felt a sort of bird-like freedom, delightfully new to him, stirring up his heart. He seemed to forget all his troubles at once, and fancied he was going to sail away to lands where poverty was never seen, and where there was a living for every able worker.

The captain of the ship was amused at Ben's earnest desire to emigrate; and after hearing a short account of his impoverished condition, he said, it was hard for a young man who was willing to work not to be able to find a job, and if he liked he might go in the ship for the voyage as a "shilling a month hand"; and no doubt he would find work enough of some kind after he got ashore in Sydney, if he turned out to be steady and active. He would have to help the butcher on board with the live stock, and make himself generally handy. Ben promised to do any work he was capable of doing, and he thanked the captain for giving him a berth. He was then told to be on board the ship with his traps before three o'clock in the afternoon, at which time it was high water, and the ship would leave the outer basin.

Ben hastened homeward in an excited state, for he dreaded a scene with his grandmother, who he knew would strongly object to his leaving her. He could hardly realize the fact that he had actually engaged to go abroad, without any preconsideration of the important step.

"Is it a solid fact, or am I dreaming about it?" soliloquised Ben, and he slackened his pace for a minute, as if to collect his thoughts. "Sure enough it is all true. I should never have dreamt of going to sea, all the way to Australia. What if I should make a fortune at the goldfields? Ha, ha! that would be nice! Grandmother would forgive me for running away in this cruel way, if I were to come back a rich man; and then, of course, I might marry any girl I had a fancy for. Hundreds of young fellows have been lucky in Australia, have mounted to the truck of fortune's greasy mast, and I'll try my luck there."

On Ben's arrival at home, he found that his grandmother had gone to market, and a little girl was left in charge of the shop. He felt glad to be spared the tearful scene he had anticipated, though he was loth to leave without saying good-bye to his dear old relative. He was about to write a few lines to her, to tell her that he was off to seek his fortune in Australia, but he reflected, that if he did so she would certainly take means to stop him from going ; so he went to his room and packed up all his wearing apparel, which he could easily carry under his arm, and then left the house without leaving any message whatever. All the money he possessed was seven shillings, which he placed on the table in his bedroom. On his way to the dock he bartered his silver watch for a mattress and a pair of blankets, and before the time specified by the captain, he was on board the ship *Bluejacket*, which soon afterwards was towed out of dock, and that night she came to an anchor off Gravesend.

Great was the consternation of Mrs. Bruce on learning from her little servant of Ben's hasty departure. Such an unprecedented act of rashness might well fill her mind with wonder and dismay. Her concern increased as her inquiries for the absentee were ineffectual to trace his whereabouts, and the poor old lady was inconsolable. She had no doubt that it was purely on account of her opposition to his matrimonial wishes that he had run away ; and she confessed to her kind friend, the city missionary, that she had sadly erred in seeking to control the natural inclination of her grandson, or of treating him as a boy, when he was a man of full growth. She ought to have known better, but she had no idea that he was so madly in love with that wax dolly of a girl next door.

Gladly would the sorrow-stricken widow have yielded to Ben's wishes if he would but return ; but there was no possibility of communicating to him her altered views, for, alas ! he was gone, and she knew not whither ! Anxiety beclouded her days, and many of her nights were passed in sleepless grief. Her shop was left almost in sole charge of the little girl aforesaid, who ate more than all the profits of the gingerbread and sweetmeat departments.

CHAPTER II.

“Adieu ! adieu ! my native shore
Fades o’er the waters blue.”

—*Byron.*

IN starting off to sea, young Bruce had acted on a sudden impulse ; but before the ship got into blue water his awakened judgment condemned the hasty movement, and he was grieved for the anxiety he knew his kind old grandmother would feel at his mysterious absence. If a life-size portrait could have been taken of him on his second night at sea, as he sat on the fore-castle moodily gazing at the foam which curled from the ship’s bows, his eyes swollen from want of sleep, and his sea-sick complexion as tawny as an old saddle, he might have served as a melancholy warning to lads in general who were of a runaway disposition. He was at a loss to account for the infatuation that had so strangely possessed him, and he was almost bewildered at his own rashness, as well as at his sad neglect of filial duty to the only relative he had in the world. To run away from home was an idea that had never before entered his brain for a moment, and sorry enough he was that he had allowed such a fugitive whim to over-rule his conscience.

But contrition came too late for any practical end, as it usually does in such cases ; there was no back door to the *Bluejacket*, and no running away from the sound of the boatswain’s whistle or the chief mate’s scolding

voice ; there he was, and whatever his sufferings were, he knew the ship would not be put back for his relief. He soon decided that it was his best policy to bear his lot patiently and without complaining, for there was not one of the crew who showed evidence of sympathy with anything of a tender nature. He sometimes thought of Jenny Timms on his lonely night watches, and wondered what she said about his sudden flight ; but as love had not thoroughly taken root in his breast, his musings of her were not of a distressing character. Memory did, no doubt, present her pretty face to his fancy's vision at times, and he gazed at it longingly—that was only natural, mortal man cannot help occasional heart-yearnings of that sort ; but Ben did not fret after her, nor did he tell any one that he had been crossed in love, as some soft-headed young fellows have been known to do in such circumstances for the sake of being pitied.

A description of an ordinary sea voyage would scarcely be even glanced at by book readers now-a-days, so I shall not give much of Ben's experience on board the *Bluejacket*. The officers considered him a handy sort of lad for odd jobs about the deck, but when he was first ordered aloft his hands were only useful to himself in holding on for his life. He soon grew more expert, however, and his willingness to work made the crew look good-naturedly at his deficiencies in nautical knowledge. After about an average passage, he landed in Sydney with three months' wages in his pocket, or three shillings, a slender sum for a man to possess in a strange land ; but some men who have risen to wealth and honour in Australia began their career with so small a capital.

Ben soon found that his trade was of no use to him

in Sydney. He might as well have been a skate-maker, or so he was jocosely told by a hatter, to whom he applied for work, and who advised him to try some fresh way of earning a living, for empty hat-boxes were as plentiful in the colony as old boots or empty blacking-bottles. His first day in Sydney was not a merry one, for even the longed-for exercise of a steady walk on dry land, after three months' staggering about on shipboard, did not interest him enough to make him forget the fact that he had served several years to learn a trade which was of no present use to him, and he felt as perplexed as a traveller who had lost his way in the bush. Towards evening he returned to the *Bluejacket*, and got permission to sleep in the forecastle. He felt half inclined to ask the captain to let him work his passage back to London; but the next morning, being in rather better spirits, he pluckily resolved that he would never go home again poorer than he was when he came away. He went on shore to seek for work, and then he found that he had erred in omitting to bring testimonials of good character with him, which he might easily have got from his old master, and from the minister of Hackney Church. He replied to two advertisements for a "steady man as light porter," but in each case he was objected to on account of his not having certificates of his honesty and sobriety.

As the day advanced Ben grew increasingly anxious about his prospects. He did not like to go on board the *Bluejacket* again at meal-times, lest he should be called a sponger, so he bought a few biscuits and dined as he strolled along, looking out for a job, and wondering how long it was possible for him to live on such a light diet. Presently he made up his mind to tramp to the Tambaroora gold diggings, where he knew that

several runaway sailors of the *Bluejacket* had gone. He was returning to the ship to get his clothes, when, on passing a seamen's outfitting shop in Lower George Street, he saw chalked on a board at the doorway, "Cook wanted for the schooner *Wolf*. Apply within."

"I'll have a try for that berth," muttered Ben, as he crossed the street. "If I am lucky enough to get it I shall have a bunk to lie down in at night and a deck over my head, and if I am cook of the ship it will be my own fault if I go to bed hungry. I learnt a little about plain cookery on board the *Bluejacket*, and I daresay they are not over-particular in a schooner, for it isn't likely they'll carry many saloon passengers. Anyway this is the first berth that seems to open up, and I'll try for it. If I don't get it, I'll be off to the diggings, and try my luck there."

On making application at the shop he was told to go on board the vessel and see the captain, so he walked to the Grafton Wharf and went on board the *Wolf*. The captain was on shore, so Ben went forward, and soon got into conversation with some of the crew, from whom he learned that the vessel was going to Newcastle, to load coal for Wellington, New Zealand; that the ballast was on board, and the hands were all shipped except the cook, and they were ready to sail with the first slant of wind.

"Is this a good safe vessel?" asked Ben with common-sense caution, but which was mistaken for natural simplicity.

"Ay, she's all right, shipmate, so long as she keeps one end of her above water," replied the man to whom the question was put.

"She's safe enough for fellows who are born to be hanged," said another sailor, who was sitting beside the

grindstone sharpening his knife. "I was in her the last voyage, and she didn't want pumping much more than an hour in a watch."

"More than an hour in a watch, eh!" exclaimed Ben, with a look of awful astonishment. "And are you going in her again?"

"I am so, governor; unless you can find me a better ship and help me to bolt away clear from this one. You are a fresh hand in this port, I guess? A Johnny-cum-lately, as the natives here call new chums."

"Yes, I have just arrived here in the *Bluejacket*."

"Then you'll find a stinging difference if you are going to sea with us. The *Bluejacket's* galley is a smarter place than our captain's cabin abaft, and you should keep to your ship if you have half a chance. I'd sooner be the *Bluejacket's* cook than be chief mate in this old box."

"I only joined her in London for the voyage to Sydney, as a shilling a month hand, so I can't keep to her if I would."

"Oh that's it, is it? I thought you didn't look like a fool. Yonder is our captain coming on board if you want to see him."

Ben hesitated for a minute or two. He was by no means satisfied with the character of the vessel; still he argued with himself, "If those sailors and the captain and mates are not afraid to go in her, I don't see why I should be. I must earn my living in some way or other, and I can't die before my time." Such specious arguments as those have been used a thousand times by men who have risked their lives in rotten ships. Ben then walked aft to the captain, and touching his cap, said he had come to offer himself as cook for the voyage.

"What ship did you sail in last?"

"The *Bluejacket*, from London, sir."

"I don't want a first-class cook on board my craft."

"I was only cook's mate occasionally on board the *Bluejacket*, sir," urged Ben. "I wish you would try me, captain."

"What wages do you want?"

"Any wages you like to give me, sir. I want a berth of some sort, for I have neither friends nor home in this part of the world, nor much money in my pocket. If you ship me I will do my best to please you."

"Well, you can't say fairer than that, my lad. Have you got your discharge from the *Bluejacket*?"

"Yes, sir, here it is."

The captain looked at it, and after a few minutes' talk with his chief mate, he told Ben he might go the voyage in the *Wolf* at £3 a month; and he was to be at the shipping-master's office at three o'clock that afternoon. Ben was overjoyed at his good fortune; he touched his cap again, and thanked the captain, and then he returned to the fore-castle and told the sailors that he had shipped as cook.

"Then I hope you know how to boil a plum duff better than our last doctor did, or your mother will never see you again after the ship gets under way." At the same time the speaker made a motion significant of throwing something overboard. Ben had had too much experience of sailors' peculiar jocoseness, when on board the *Bluejacket*, to be scared by these homicidal hints; moreover, he was in an exultant mood at having got employment, so he laughingly replied, that he could cook a plum duff or a pot of skouse with the second best man that ever entered a collier's caboose, if he wasn't a French professor of cookery.

"You are all the go then, shipmate. When are you

going to bring your dunnage on board?" Ben told him that he had promised the captain to be on board in time to get his tea ready.

"All right, doctor. There's a bucketful of red bream under the windlass; you had better be in time to cook the lot for our supper; and take care you don't choke us all with scales."

"If you find half a scale when I have dished up, you may heave it at my head," said Ben, whereupon his shipmates laughed and said he would do for them.

"And now will one of you nice-looking seamen show me which is to be my berth?" added Ben, in the same lively strain that seemed to have pleased the sailors, like fiddling.

"Ay, ay, shipmate; come this way," replied the man who had last spoken, and whose name was Frank; at the same time he dived down the fore-castle scuttle. "That is your bunk up in the forepeak, starboard side. A snug crib it is too, and no danger of your rolling out in heavy weather. But you must mind what you are about with your fingers and toes, or you'll soon be spoiled for your cooking business. The voyage before last we shipped a Dutchman at Hokitiki, for the run back to Sydney. He slept in that same bunk; and one night, when the ship was knocking about in a breeze, he couldn't sleep, I suppose, so to amuse himself he goes feeling about for cockroaches and other vermin, which swarm up in that end of the ship. He foolishly put his hand into a gap between the timbers to catch something, and the next roll the ship gave his fingers were jammed as flat as a seal's flipper. Poor fellow! he wasn't a sailor man you may be sure, at any rate, he wasn't used to sailing in an old collier, or he would have known better than to poke his fingers between her

timbers in a seaway, for they nip like tigers. I tell you that bit of a yarn just to caution you, if you are inclined to be fidgety in bed."

"Thank you for the hint. I shall look out for my fingers and toes. But this must be a very old vessel to work in that dangerous way."

"Not much more than a dozen years old ; but she is a sloop-built concern, all soft wood and iron fastenings ; and every tree-nail in her is as tender as a boiled parsnip. She doesn't look amiss as she is lying at the wharf, but when she gets into bad weather she works like an old coach, and then ' pump away, boys ' is the command, and to shirk it is sudden death by drowning. I have told you the character of the ship, as you asked me for it, but I don't want to scare you off, for I think you will be just the very man to suit us for a cook."

"How is it that you are not afraid to sail in the ship ?" asked Ben.

"A sailor mustn't be afraid of anything unless he is content to starve. I can't die more than once, you know."

"That is true enough, but it is natural to wish to live as long as you can, and it isn't a pleasant prospect either to be drowned or to be worked to death."

"Well, it's happy-go-lucky with me, shipmate. I would sooner sail in a stanch ship, but I cannot always pick and choose, because I have a bad habit of sprecing away all my money when I come off a voyage, and then I am bound to go to sea again to get rations, and I take the first ship I can get."

"I would certainly try to get a sound ship, if I knew a good one from a bad one as well as you do," remarked Ben.

"There must be hands to man old 'clumbungs' as

well as crack ships, you know, else how could they go to sea?" replied Frank, with a peculiar shrug. "My life isn't worth more than another man's—not so much as some fellow who has a wife or a sweetheart to fret after him."

Ben felt inclined to go aft and tell the captain that he wouldn't ship in the *Wolf*, but when he reflected on the poor condition of his pockets, he changed his mind again and resolved to try his luck for one voyage. That afternoon he went on board with his scanty outfit, and at midnight the *Wolf* was scudding along before a southerly wind, on her passage to Newcastle.

CHAPTER III.

“From bounding billows, first in motion where the distant whirl-
winds rise,
To the tempest-troubled ocean, where the seas contend with
skies.”

—*Dibdin.*

BEN BRUCE was perhaps as well qualified for the duties he had engaged to perform on board the *Wolf*, as many other men are who have suddenly stepped into offices of greater responsibility. He was certainly not a trained cook, but he had had a little experience in the galley on board the *Bluejacket*, and he was naturally expert or handy; moreover he had pretty strong confidence in himself, which is usually helpful to a man in any condition of life, if it does not swell into self-conceit.

The chief officer of the *Bluejacket* had not been very patient at Ben's ignorance of nautical operations in the first part of the voyage, and he used to threaten various processes, new to Ben, in order to incite him to look more sailor-like. The poor fellow had not time enough, neither had he the means, to procure a complete outfit before sailing from London, and so far as his dress helped him he looked as little like a sailor as he did like a soldier. His only pair of boots, which were studded with hob-nails, were a great annoyance to the chief mate, who said they marked the decks like horses' hoofs. It is the way of the world to side with the strong against the weak, and for a time Ben was a mark for the

waggery and practical jokes of the sailors, which were sometimes more galling to him than the severity of the mate. He discarded the objectionable boots and went barefooted, but even that submissive spirit was not kindly appreciated, and the nickname of "Clinker" clung to him throughout the voyage.

Poor indeed is the man who cannot find *one* friend in a civilized community. Ben was not so badly off as that, for the cook showed sympathy of a substantial kind, which is always more useful than bare pity. He was strong in patronage in his own limited sphere; a fact which none of the sailors doubted, though they did not all come in for a share of it. By right of common custom, all hands might join in the scramble for tit-bits when the soiled plate baskets were carried from the cabin to the galley, after dinner, but the higher privilege of scraping out the saucepans could only be awarded to a favoured few, whom the cook was pleased to nominate. Ben was a special favourite in that way, and it was more than once remarked by envious tars that he fared as well as the skipper himself. Cooks sometimes fare even better than their masters or mistresses—and who can prevent them from doing so if their gustatory propensities are stronger than their conscientious principles? In return for the cook's kindness, Ben was always willing to do odd jobs in the galley, and thus he picked up culinary knowledge enough to warrant him in taking charge of the caboose on board the *Wolf*, as I have explained.

"Hallo there, up in the forepeak! Are you going to lie in your bunk till somebody carries your breakfast to you? Heave out, doctor, and get the coffee kettle under way." That was the gruff but good-natured summons of his shipmate, Frank, on the morning after the

Wolf left Sydney. Ben opened his eyes, and without staying to give one lazy roll over, he turned out of bed and dressed himself, and then went on deck to his duty.

It was grey dawn, and the vessel was rolling along before a fresh gale. Bird Island bore about north-west, distant seven miles. Ben lighted the fire in his caboose and put the kettle on, and then he got some fresh water in a bucket and washed his hands and face, a wholesome operation which some sea cooks are apt to slight. "I don't see the crew pumping ship," muttered Ben to himself, while he combed his hair smooth, "and there is not even the sign of a spray coming on deck. This cannot be a bad vessel after all, and I half fancy those sailors were joking, or only trying if they could frighten me, when they said she was under water half her time when at sea. I am glad they did not scare me away from the ship." His confidence in his cookery soon increased as pleasantly as his belief in the seaworthiness of the *Wolf*; for the sailors at breakfast-time agreed, in characteristic terms, that the beefsteaks and onions were done to perfection, and that the fried potatoes were luxuries which no other cook on board the *Wolf* had ever provided, because he grudged to use a little dripping, or slush as it is called, and which cooks usually claim as a perquisite.

Every man likes his doings to be appreciated. The feeling varies in degree according to the development of approbateness, but it is pretty much the same in character whether it exists in the heart or brain of a sea cook or a statesman. There never was a newly inspired poet who did not feel a sort of mild gladness when told that his last published verses were full of merit; and the reverend pastor is not up to the happy mark if he does not feel his heart glow with grateful joy at hearing even the humblest member of his flock say that he got good

under last Sunday's sermon. The most prosy old sea captain afloat would be secretly pleased to hear his ship called the smartest clipper in the port, and the cleverest cook that ever handled spit or skewer would not be above the soothing influence of wholesome encomium. Such is life ! Ben considered that his first performance in the caboose was a success, inasmuch as the sailors lauded it and the captain and mate did not complain of it, and he was highly gratified. About mid-day the *Wolf* dropped anchor in Newcastle harbour, and Ben might have been seen stirring up the fire under his coppers to cook the dinner, and singing merrily, "A Life on the Ocean Wave !"

The next day the *Wolf* took in a cargo of coal up to her hatches in less than half the time that it had taken the crew to discharge thirty tons of ballast : such is the facility now for shipping the coal which is dug out of the many hills and plains about Newcastle, and which has made that one of the busiest ports in New South Wales. Before the crew had time to clear up the decks, the *Wolf* was towed to sea, and began her voyage with a fair wind and fine weather.

For three days all went on as favourably as could be wished, and Ben, who but rarely suffered from sea-sickness, felt almost as much at home in his caboose as if he were in Mr. Chipplet's hat-box factory at Bethnal Green. But on the fourth day out there was a change in the weather. A south-east breeze sprang up, which soon freshened into a gale, and then for the first time Ben could realize the poetical nature of Frank's statement, that the *Wolf* was as lively as a diving-bell when she was deeply loaded. In his innocence Ben had first judged the weatherly qualities of the vessel when she was running under easy sail, in light ballast trim ; but her

behaviour was strikingly different when she was overladen with dead-weight cargo, and contending against a gale of wind and a head sea. She plunged and rolled to a dangerous degree, and waves occasionally broke on board, which set Ben's saucepans afloat, and made him shudder for the fate of his caboose and his connection with it.

Men with more pretensions to wisdom than Ben had, have been astray in their judgment in matters of greater moment than the qualities of a vessel. It has often happened, even in select society, that young men have formed exalted opinions of women, whom they have chosen for life partners, when they have been in holiday trim, or "flying light," as sailors say, and have afterwards found, to their grief, that the objects of their loving choice were only fit for the fair weather of prosperity, and unable to face the adverse breezes of misfortune either with courage or patient endurance.

The gale increased, and the ship laboured so heavily that it was necessary to lighten her by throwing part of her cargo overboard, which was done with much difficulty, and at the risk of being swamped if a heavy sea broke on board while the hatches were off. Ben was seized with shuddering awe every time he looked out of his galley door at the huge waves, which threatened to roll on board and smash the groaning *Wolf* into splinters; but he manfully stuck to his post of duty. The crew complained that their pea-soup was weakened with sea water; still they could not reasonably blame the cook because a spray now and then dashed over the tops of his coppers, and it was a matter for wonder to them that he managed to keep his fire alight. Glad enough was he when he could shut up his galley for the night, and go below to take off his wet clothes and go

to bed. When in his berth he felt himself free from the risk of being washed overboard, but he could not overcome the dread he had of going to the bottom of the sea in the *Wolf*; for she leaked badly, and the incessant creaking of her straining timbers kept him wakeful and anxious. Sorely he regretted his rashness in starting off to sea before he had used even ordinary exertions to get employment on shore; and he silently vowed that if he lived to tread dry land again, he would never more venture afloat as a sailor. That is a sort of vow which has been made much oftener than it has been kept. Ben was just beginning to get comfortably warm in his bed, when the scuttle was thrown back, and Frank descended to the forecabin, his oilskins glistening with salt water. He looked into Ben's bunk and exclaimed, "Hallo, doctor! There you are snug enough. I am sorry to disturb you, as the cat said to the rat in the cheese locker, but you must tumble out of that, and come and take a spell at the pumps."

"I hope we are not sinking," said Ben, sitting up in his bunk, and looking much concerned at Frank's summons.

"She is all afloat yet, shipmate; but if we keep yawning instead of pumping, she will go down under us in less than an hour; so rouse out and slip yourself into your oilskins."

"I shipped as cook, you know, Frank; and I don't think it is my duty to pump. I never ask any of you sailors to fill my coppers or my coal-box for me. I like fair play, whether I am on sea or on shore."

"Ay, fair play is nice enough when you can get it, doctor. But it is no use your sitting there palavering to me about your duty; you had better come on deck, I tell you. It is every man's duty to work for his life.

Poor Dumby got half his ribs stove in by the last sea that broke on board, and he is lying on the cabin floor disabled."

"I am sorry to hear that, Frank. Is he much hurt?"

"I guess he is damaged for life, poor fellow! He was washed from the lee pump smash against the iron davits of the jolly-boat. He was a real good hand to work; I'll say that for him, though he was always too proud and sulky to speak to his messmates. You must take his place at the pump, Ben, so up you come on deck after me, or the second mate will soon be down to coax you up, and you won't like his toe-and-heel style of argument."

Ben had no confidence in the tenderness of the second mate, so he shivered into his damp clothes, and as he did so he tried to ponder the mysterious questions, which have so often been speculated upon by simple landmen; namely, Why the law allows unseaworthy ships to go to sea? and why seamen who have once escaped being drowned by the sinking of a rotten ship, will venture to sea at a similar risk? Poor Ben could not go into the abstract theory of demand and supply, and he was ignorant of the various ramifications of trade interests, or money-making wheels within wheels innumerable, some of which would be stopped for ever if there were no unseaworthy ships. Good Samuel Plimsoll has long been bravely trying to reform some of the maritime evils and abuses, which have strewn the bottom of the sea with dead men's bones. May God speed him in his humane efforts! Let every sailor's wife in the world say Amen to that short petition.

Ben might have judged that it was as easy to get sailors to man rotten ships as it is to get horses to draw rickety street cars, if he had reflected on the readiness

with which he shipped in the *Wolf* for the sake of earning an honest livelihood. But he had not time for much reflection ; besides, it isn't every man who can philosophize calmly with death roaring in his ears. As soon as he showed himself on deck, he was peremptorily ordered to take a turn at the starboard pump. Ben had always been pleased to join the crew of the *Bluejacket* at the pumps every evening, just before changing the watch at eight bells. They usually had a song over it, and it gave him a nice chance of letting the listening passengers on the poop hear his fine tenor voice. The *Bluejacket* was a tight ship ; that is to say, it took only about ten minutes pumping every night, and the crew were rather sorry that their song was shortened by the early sucking of the pumps. That was the romance of leakiness. But what a dreary difference there was in Ben's feelings when he caught hold of the slippery handle of the *Wolf's* pump on that stormy night ! That was a stern reality. No poetry in that monotonous motion, and the crew were as mute as fishes or dead birds, save when they now and then gave vent to a natural grumble at their hard lot. Ben's back was almost broken before the welcome words, "Spell oh !" called him to resign his post to another man, and to rest for ten minutes.

The *Wolf* was hove-to under storm staysails and balance-reefed main-trysail, and if she had been fairly laden she would probably have weathered the gale without damage ; but she was too deep to lift to the waves, or, as Frank remarked, there was no life in her, and heavy seas frequently broke over her, washing everything movable off the deck and endangering the lives of the drenched crew. Ben had just left the pump for the second time at the sound of "Spell oh !" and was

leaning against the mainmast, rubbing his back, when he heard the captain shout to the crew to look out for themselves. Almost at the same moment a surging wave came tumbling on board, and Ben felt himself violently hurled down to leeward. He heard the crashing of the bulwarks, and he felt the numbing pain of his broken bones. A horror of death came over him, a recollection of a lifetime of sin, a terrible sense of suffocation and struggling, and then consciousness forsook him.

CHAPTER IV.

“Cheerfulness is medicine for the mind.”

“HERE you are, messmates ; snugly moored in blanket bay, out of the roar of the breakers,” said Frank, as he descended to the forecastle where Ben and the wounded sailor, Dumby, were lying in their berths, on the sick list. “No watch on deck or slaughtering work at the pumps for you lucky boys ! Nothing to do but lie on your backs and reckon up your wages running on every day, and plan out the easiest way to spend it all when you get on shore. Eh, what do you say, Ben ? You are not over jolly. Ha, ha ! I should think not by the look of your lemon-coloured phiz ; but you ought to be pretty comfortable anyway. I wish I were you for an hour or two this busy morning.”

“Ah, it’s nice perhaps to be off duty for a week or so in a vessel where there is no time at all allowed for play ; but if you had my broken bones you would soon wish you were Frank Shorter again, with a sound body,” replied Ben in a feeble tone. “The sea is smoother than it was, I can feel, for the ship doesn’t pitch so much. Where are we now ?”

“We are skimming along under the lee of Mount Egmont, but we shall open Cook’s Straits in an hour or two, and if we don’t get a hard breeze then, we shall have better luck than I ever had before in this part. I

don't know the reason why, but it is nearly always blowing hard in these straits either up or down, and you very seldom get a smooth slant ; anyway, I have never yet heard any fellow say that he was ever lucky enough to get one."

"Oh dear ! I hope we shan't have any more bad weather, Frank. My leg is middling easy now the ship is quieter, but if I move about it pains me very much."

"Of course it does ; that's only nature hinting to you to lie still and don't fidget. I know what crushed bones feel like, for I had my right leg fractured when I was a lad, and I hadn't very tender nursing either. You must keep your limb as still as death till the bones begin to splice together again, or the chances are that you'll be bandy-legged for life : and then I shall be called a botch, as many careful surgeons have been called when the fault was in the wriggling patient himself. I hope we shan't have any more such weather as we had last week ; for with two hands short of our crew, if there is any more extra pumping, we shall all be laid up, and the ship must go down. Now then, my lads, stand by for your skilly," added Frank, producing two pannikins full of gruel. "This isn't rich tack, but I couldn't do much with mouldy oatmeal, and only coarse salt to flavour it. It has been cooked in a clean saucepan, I can say that much in its favour. Come, Dumby ! open your eyes, and you will see something to put in your mouth. It is time you took a feed, for you have not swallowed a parrot's allowance for the last five days. Rouse up, my bonnie ! Never say die !"

But Dumby did not take any notice of Frank's friendly appeals ; whereupon Ben said, "Don't disturb him if he's asleep, Frank. He suffers terribly in his

chest, poor fellow ; and his moaning is distressing to hear sometimes. It half frightens me."

"I'll be bound he does suffer real torture, for he was badly crushed, and I can't help him, worse luck. His breakages are beyond the skill of a sailor or a surgeon either, because they can't be handled at all. I set your limb almost as easily as I could fish a wooden leg, but there is no getting at his broken bones, any more than you can get at the timbers of a ship when she is full of cargo. I am afraid the jagged ends of his ribs have damaged some of the tender concerns near his lungs or his heart, poor fellow ! The best doctor in the world can't cure a disease unless he can get at the cause of it, you know."

"You make a capital doctor, Frank. I believe you have saved my life."

"I don't know about that, Ben. A man seldom dies of a broken leg and a few bruises on his head, especially if he is a sailor in a craft like this, where he is not in danger of living too high, and where there is no grog served out. As for my skill in doctor's work, it isn't much to boast of. I should be no better than an impudent quack if I said I knew much about it, when men of first-class education, and long medical practice, sometimes own that they don't know half as much as they would like to know about human ailments, and the way to cure them. Still, for all that, I should be stupidly thick-headed if I didn't know something about dressing a wound or splicing a simple breakage, considering the long service I have had in the navy ; and that part of my time I use to help the doctors in the hospital."

"Oh, you have been in the navy, have you, Frank ?"

"I have so, and on this coast too, for many years. I was on board the *Hazard* frigate at that terrible set-to

with the Maories, to the northward, when Lieutenant Philpotts was massacred. But you don't recollect that affray, and I haven't time to tell you about it now. I think it is better to let poor Dumby alone, as he seems to be dozing; perhaps sleep will do him more good than this musty gruel. I will carry it back to the galley and keep it hot for him." At that moment the mate shouted down the scuttle for Frank to come on deck and help to shorten sail.

"I told you we should get a breeze in the straits, and the skipper is going to prepare for it. Take care of yourself, Ben. If the ship begins to knock about much, I will come and block you up with something soft." Frank then hastened up the scuttle, and Ben lay and listened to his lusty voice singing hoy, hoy! while hawling down or clewing up the flapping sails.

I must now explain, that when Ben was dashed into the lee scuppers by the heavy sea which broke on board, he was given up for lost by his shipmates, who were for a time too much occupied in taking care of themselves to afford help to others. The same wave swept away the caboose, also the long-boat from amidships, and smashed most of the bulwarks. After awhile Ben was found quite insensible, but clutching with the tenacity of death's grip to a bight of the fore-sheet. He was picked up and carried into the cabin, when it was found that his left leg was broken, and he had received some severe contusions on his head. Frank acted as surgeon, and, with the help of the second mate, splintered up the broken limb, and dressed the scalp wounds. They then carried the sufferer forward and laid him in his berth.

A thorough-bred sailor is perhaps one of the handiest of men in an emergency of any sort, from a wreck at sea to a fire on shore; in fact, sailors are usually ready to

lend a hand at any job, whether it be rough or smooth, hazardous or otherwise. As a rule, they are not good horsemen; still, when they are above the affectation of awkwardness, which some of them love to display, they soon become clever in the management of horses, and are expert and fearless drivers. I once saw a superannuated man-of-war's man drive a tandem down one of the mountain roads near Braidwood, and though he had no reins to his leading horse, he drove his team at a smart trot. A lady passenger sat beside him in the cart, and she seemed to have perfect confidence in her sailor driver. The railway authorities in New South Wales and Victoria show good judgment in employing many nautical men on their railway lines; for the watchfulness and promptitude which are necessary parts of their duty on shipboard, together with the discipline to which they have been trained, render sailors peculiarly fitted for the responsible posts of officers of railway trains. They also make excellent fire-brigade men. I have had many sailors in my employ, both at sea and on shore, so I can to some extent write experimentally of their trustworthy qualities. But my remarks only refer to sailors of the steady and intelligent sort. Drinking, rollicking jack tars are only useful in ships where there is no grog, either in the store-room or in the hold. They will work hard while they are forced to keep sober, but usually they are troublesome fellows, and sometimes highly mischievous.

Frank Shorter was one of the handy sort of seamen, though he confessed that he was not to be trusted if he got within the scent of grog. He had served many years in Her Majesty's navy, and had gained prize money enough to have bought a snug little house for himself in his old age if he had taken care of it. But

he never would save a shilling. Plenty of grog and a fiddle, or a "free and easy" concert at a tavern, were Frank's ideas of happiness on shore ; and no sooner was he off a cruise than he began to indulge his fancy, and to squander his money as recklessly as if he had stolen it, instead of working hard to earn it. Frank was about fifty years of age, and he had the peculiar rolling gait and the unmistakable cut of a real seaman. He was only of medium height, but was stout and strongly made. His bronzed face seemed to index a mind that was not easily disturbed by trifles, and a glance at his head when his grizzled locks were thrown off his brow, would assure any intelligent observer that he had a fair share of common-sense and quick perception. He had small grey eyes, and they usually seemed to be twinkling at some humorous idea in their owner's brain. He had a large nose with a highly-coloured tip. He used to say that it cost him more money to give his grog-blossomed nose that pure mulberry tinge than would have built and rigged a handy-sized schooner. He had a generous disposition and "a heart that could feel for another," and he attended to his sick shipmates as gently as a trained nurse. He never swore nor used obscene language ; and there was an honest quaintness about his occasional grumbling which made it more tolerable than the preaching of some persons that I have had to listen to in my travels.

Dumby, as he was called (and the nickname by which he was known to the crew), had shipped in Sydney as an ordinary seaman only a few hours before Ben joined the *Wolf*. From his first appearance on board his manner was morose and repulsive. His unsociable bearing had subjected him to jeering remarks from members of the crew, who said he was too proud for

his calling. They sometimes, with mock respect, dubbed him "The Marquis," and they would contrive to let him in for the worst jobs in the watch—such as furling the jib, or hauling out the earing at the boom end when reefing the main-trysail. But he never showed want of courage or a disposition to slink from a post of danger; and though he did not rank A.B. (able seaman), he was the most careful helmsman on board, and at reefing or furling a sail he was as expert as a crack yachtsman. In his watch below, when out of his bunk, he was usually employed writing, with the top of his chest for a desk, and the rapidity with which he moved his pen was a marvel to his untutored shipmates, some of whom guessed that he was a broken-down lawyer's clerk; others said he was a soldier officer in disguise; but they all agreed that he was a sulky fellow, because he took his meals by himself and seldom spoke a word to any one on board. He was a tall, well-built man, and had evidently been handsome at one period of his life; but the effects of dissipation and neglect were very apparent in his face, and in his crouching figure also. He was about forty-eight years of age. Though dressed in sailor's gear, there was a decided superiority in his look, and he seemed to be conscious of it. Of his previous history, or where he came from, no one on board had the least knowledge; and he never seemed to hear any questions that were put to him on the subject, or he never answered them. Hence he acquired the nickname of Dumby. During his watch, when not at the helm, he would pace the main-deck with a stately step apparently lost in thought, and at times would throw his arms out, as if he were suddenly overcome by a painful emotion. Ben fancied he was in great trouble, and spoke to him in a friendly way on several occasions

when he came into the caboose to light his pipe, but he always replied very briefly, and showed a disinclination for conversation.

I have before alluded to Dumby's mishap when he was washed from the pump by a heavy sea. He was carried below to his bunk soon after the accident, and was looked after as carefully as possible under the circumstances. But he did not rally much; and Frank's first opinion, that he had received a severe internal injury, was confirmed from day to day. The captain and mate visited him sometimes, but neither of them could induce him to speak a word, and he obstinately refused to take the medicines they recommended. There he lay for a week or more in intense pain, and his stifled groans kept Ben's sympathies in full stretch. Frank was very attentive to the suffering man, and as Ben lay and from time to time watched the real kindness of the rough old sailor, he conceived an affection for him which did not wear away. Kindness always influences the heart to love.

About an hour after Frank went on deck, at the command of the mate to shorten sail, Ben could tell by the uneasy motion of the vessel that she was no longer under the lee of the land, and his broken limb was painful again. Presently Frank re-entered the fore-castle with a bundle of oakum, which he packed around Ben's mattress to block him up in his bunk and keep him from rolling about.

"Is it going to blow hard, Frank?" asked Ben, with an anxious look.

"I think it is blowing stiff enough now, shipmate. The sea is feather white, and we are under double-reefed canvas; but the sea will be more lumpy when we get clear of the land, and then you must look out and keep this limb of yours from working or wriggling about.

You will have nothing else to do, and that little job will amuse you. I have padded your crib as carefully as if you were a young prize bull, and I don't think you can fetch way now. I hope poor Dumby will weather it out. If he wakes up before I come down again, tell him there is some gruel in the hook-pot alongside his bunk. We shall have a dead beat all the way up to Mapuwa, and the *Wolf* will jump about a bit ; so take care of yourself, Ben, and mind your bad leg. There's the second mate shouting 'All hands' again, so I must go on deck. What a pleasant voice that young man has got, to be sure ! Smooth as a rusty fog-horn. I wonder if he has got a sweetheart ? Ay, ay, sir ! I'm coming," added Frank, in reply to the gruff question of the second mate "if he were down there shaving himself, while the ship was getting water-logged ?"

CHAPTER V.

“O life ! Thou art a galling load, Along a rough, a weary road,
To wretches such as I.”

—*Burns.*

SOON after Frank had gone on deck, the *Wolf* began to pitch heavily, and Ben would have suffered increased pain in his broken limb, but for the kindly forethought of his friend, in blocking him up in his bunk. The oakum had a strong scent of tar ; but Ben fancied it helped to neutralize odours of a less agreeable kind, and the tight padding kept him from rolling about. There he lay and ruminated over past events in his history, and tried to penetrate the future ; but his misty glances in that direction were always downwards to the bottom of the sea, where he fancied he could see his own body lying on the weedy rocks, and surrounded by a shoal of nibbling fishes. The ominous groaning of the *Wolf's* timbers as the waves thumped against her sides, and the constant clanking of the pumps, were encouraging to the morbid idea that his bunk would be his coffin ; and again he bewailed his impetuosity in running from his home, to meet trouble and disaster on sea and on shore, which he might have avoided altogether. He was trying to imagine what his choking sensations would be when the *Wolf* gave her final plunge, never to rise again, and how he would feel as the waters of death rushed down the forecastle scuttle, when he was startled by an un-

usually heavy groan from Dumby, in the opposite berth; and on looking over he saw him struggling into a sitting posture, while his face bore a ghastly death-like hue, which was almost horrible to behold. In gasping accents he said, "Cook, can you go aft and tell the captain that I want to see him immediately?"

"No; it's impossible. I am almost as disabled as you are."

"Then you are in a bad case, and I am sorry for you, young man. What is your name?"

"Benjamin Bruce."

"Bruce, did you say? Where did you come from?"

"From Sydney. I shipped as cook a few hours before we sailed."

"Yes, I remember seeing you come on board; but I shall not see you go on shore. I must die in this gloomy forecastle, unknown and uncared for. Such is my fate, and I can't alter it now." Dumby then lay for several minutes and raved out fearful imprecations against the owner of the *Wolf*, for sending his vessel to sea murderously overladen. At length he got so violently excited that Ben shouted for Frank, under the terrifying impression that the man was mad.

"Hush! you silly fellow! What are you afraid of? Cease your noise, and listen to what I say. I have something very important to disclose."

The sick man raised himself in his berth, and his half-imploring, half-commanding look awed Ben into silence. He might have called long enough for Frank without receiving an answer, for he was at the pumps; and the roaring of the wind and waves prevented his hearing the call. Ben lay and trembled into a cold sweat. Presently Dumby said, in a sepulchral tone,—

"The pain I am suffering is more than mortal nature

can bear very long, and my hours are numbered. If the ship had kept steady till we got to Wellington, I might have had a chance for my life, but this horrid motion will soon make an end of me. I am dying now. 'Seest thou thy brother shipwrecked, look well to thy tackling.' Tush, man! don't be afraid of me! I could not harm you if I wished to do it. Listen! I have a solemn request to make—a very important trust to depute to you. Can you hear what I say?"

"Yes, sir, I am listening," said Ben, and he was trembling too.

"You must promise—ay, you must solemnly declare to me that you will perform what I am about to request. I do not willingly impose this trust upon you, but I have no alternative. If you could call the captain down here I would ask him to do it. He might perhaps be a more respected agent. I cannot hold out much longer under this frightful torture, and probably you are the only mortal who will see my death struggles. I little thought I should come to this wretched, helpless condition, and die in such a dog-hole! But I have been sowing for a sad harvest."

Dumby spoke in short, disjointed sentences, and with a painful effort to articulate distinctly. For a few minutes he seemed to be overcome by emotion, but recovering his voice he checked Ben again for shouting for Frank. "If it would save my life you could not make any one hear your call; so, for pity's sake, lie still, young man, and listen to what I have to say! You must do what I request, and you may depend upon being well paid for your time and trouble. Will you promise me to do it honestly? Why don't you answer my question, Bruce?"

"I am afraid I shall not live very long myself, sir.

We had better wait till Frank comes down. I am sure he will do whatever you ask him. Do, pray, wait till he comes. He won't be long."

"Can you get out of your berth?" asked Dumby, without seeming to heed Ben's excited remarks. "Can you get up, I ask?"

"Oh dear no! I cannot stir off my back."

"Then I must make a last effort," gasped Dumby: at the same time he struggled out of his berth and stood on the deck, looking like the shadow of death. He opened his chest and took therefrom a quantity of manuscript, which he made up into a roll and tied it round with a silken guard attached to the key of his chest. "That is the last knot I shall ever tie," he said, as he fastened the ends of the guard. "I cannot seal this packet, for I have no means of doing it; but see you to it that it is not untied by any other hands than those to whom I am now about to direct it. He then took a pen from his chest and wrote a name and address on the parcel, and gave it to Ben. "Now, Benjamin Bruce, you solemnly declare in the presence of a dying man, that you will faithfully preserve this packet from prying eyes, and deliver it as directed?"

"It pains me to refuse you, sir, but I dare not promise to do that. I may not live, or I may be a helpless cripple, or——"

"Of course death will absolve you from all your earthly obligations. I have not asked you to do impossibilities. Do not dally with me, my good lad! I am getting faint, and my voice will soon be stopped for ever—hushed in this world, I mean. I ask you to promise that you will do your utmost to carry out my dying request. You will certainly be well paid for the service, and perhaps it may put you in the way to

fortune—if you are ambitious for what now seems to me as unsubstantial as the froth of the sea waves.”

“Where does the person live to whom I am to give the parcel—that is, if I am able to deliver it?”

“In the north of England. You may read the address presently.”

“Oh dear! that is a long way off. How am I to get there? I have no money to pay my way.”

“Take this key of my chest. There is very little money in it, but there are several articles of money value. The diamond ring cost me thirty guineas, and my gold watch is an expensive one. Whatever the chest contains I give to you; and rest assured you will be amply rewarded if you deliver the packet safely to its destination, for it is of great value to my family, though useless to a stranger. Do you now promise?”

“I solemnly promise and vow that I will do my utmost to carry out your wishes in an honest way. I dare not say more than that.”

“It is enough. Give me your hand.” He reached over and took Ben’s hand into his clammy grasp, and said, “Thank you, my good friend, thank you! Now I have something else to say to you, but I must first get into my berth again, if I can.” He then made two or three futile efforts to climb back into his bunk, and finally sank down on his sea-chest exhausted and apparently in great pain. For ten minutes or more his groans were horrifying. Ben continued to shout for help until he was hoarse, but no help came; he was in the act of crawling out of his berth, dragging his broken limb after him, when Dumby’s paroxysm subsided, and he faintly gasped, “Lie still, Bruce; I have something more to say to you. Do you know Melbourne?”

“No, sir, I have never been there.”

"You must go there, as soon as possible. Listen! In the bottom of my chest you will find a pencil drawing or map of Fitzroy Gardens. On the spot marked with the Greek letter Δ , which is exactly four feet due north from an elm-tree, dig with your knife, and a foot below the surface you will find a small tin box. Take that box and deliver it to the same gentleman to whom I have directed the parcel of manuscript. Will you solemnly promise me to do that? Speak up quickly, my friend; you can see my time is short. Don't dally or trifle with a man who is just about to dive into eternity."

"I can only repeat the promise I made just now, that I will do all in my power to carry out your wishes," said Ben, after a short pause.

"I am satisfied. Keep your promise faithfully, and you will have good reason to be glad that you have undertaken the executorship of this my last will; but mind, Bruce, I emphatically warn you again not to open the tin box, nor untie the silken cord which these death-clammy fingers of mine have bound round the parcel of manuscript, or you will have frightful cause to regret your breach of trust. You will see ——"

"Oh, my good sir! pray don't say any more. I cannot bear to hear it," interrupted Ben, who began again to quake violently before the almost supernatural glare of the dying man's eyes. "I will do my best to carry out your wishes, and I solemnly vow that I will not pry into anything that you entrust to my charge."

"I thank you again, Bruce. Forgive me if I have seemed to suspect you of duplicity. I have broken promises and vows so often myself, that I am meanly suspicious of others. I believe you are honest. There is a pocket Bible in my chest. Alas! it is years ago

since I last read it. If I had shaped my life by its holy precepts and injunctions, I should not now be a hopeless fugitive dying in the forecastle of a rotten collier schooner. But it is too late to alter my fate. I must suffer the penalty of my egregious folly. You will see my real name written on the fly-leaf of the book. The name I have signed on the ship's articles is an assumed one; but it will be well for you to keep that fact a secret for awhile. I am an outcast from society, a guilty, polluted wretch. I have lived a reprobate, and, alas! I am dreadfully unprepared to die. Death is a terrible reality to me, now that I am within its overpowering grip. Good Lord, have mercy upon me!"

The poor man then covered his face with his hands and wept. Presently he turned towards Ben, as if again about to speak, when he was seized with a fit, and fell to the deck in the agonies of death. Ben shouted for help, but in vain, no one heard his cries; so, in sheer desperation, he wriggled out of bed to the ladder under the scuttle, but could get no farther. Overpowered by the pain of his broken limb and the terrible shock to his nerves, he sank down on the deck, almost alongside the writhing body of the dying man. Such a position would be trying to the courage of a strong healthy man, and it is no wonder that Ben, whose system was enervated by his sufferings and by the unwholesome air of his hospital, should have swooned with terror. How long he was in that unconscious state is not certain, but on recovering himself, there was the ghastly face of his dead shipmate before his eyes. It would be hard to imagine a more shocking position for a sick man to be placed in, and Ben's courage was tried beyond its strength. His imagination, always active, fairly ran away with him, and filled the forecastle with shapes of a

terrifying character. For an hour or more he called loudly for help, without any response. At length he saw the rough face of Frank looking down the scuttle and he exclaimed piteously, "Oh, Frank! do pray come down here."

"What are you shouting about, man? I can't leave the deck just now. Two of the weather main shrouds have been carried away. I must cover up the scuttle, for we are going to wear the ship round, and we may get a sea on board."

The scuttle hatch was then put on and Ben was left in total darkness. It was a slight relief to him, for it hid the distorted features of the dead man. The noise of active feet on the deck above him also helped to remove the horrid feeling of loneliness with death. By the movements of the crew he judged that they were putting the vessel on the opposite tack, in order to save the mainmast from going over the side. The ship was wore round without any serious mishap, and soon afterwards the scuttle hatch was removed and Frank descended to the forecastle.

"Hallo, my lads! Are you lying on the deck to cool yourselves in this freezing weather? Mercy 'pon us! Dumby is dead!" he added, in the same breath, but in a very different tone, as he caught sight of the upturned face of the corpse. How long has he been lying there Ben? Poor old fellow! he has had a hard struggle with death, by the look of him."

"Oh pray help me into my bunk again, Frank, and I will tell you all about it."

"You ought not to have got out of your bunk for anybody. That leg of yours is all adrift again, I can see," said Frank, as he lifted Ben off the deck. "Look at this now! your toes are slewed athwart-ships. Hang

on to me. Now, then, hoy, hoy! up you go! There you are in bed once more, and you had better lie still till I get time to splice your limb again. Poor old Dumby! I am sorry we used to joke him so much."

"Sit down for a few minutes, Frank. I want to tell you something about him."

"I haven't time to sit down now, Ben. I must go and lend a hand to pass a hawser over the head of the mainmast. It is a burning shame to let a vessel come to sea with such rotten gear as we have on board."

"Throw a blanket over Dumby's body before you go on deck, Frank; and come below as soon as you can, there's a good fellow."

"Ay, ay, boy. And we must carry the body out of this as soon as we can. I don't like having a dead man in my sleeping crib; it isn't wholesome, let alone the fancy of the thing."

In less than an hour Frank came down again, and said that the captain was bearing up for smooth water under the lee of the land, in order to repair the damaged rigging, and to give the hands at the pumps a little breathing time; for which information Ben was heartily glad.

"That poor fellow gave me an awful shock, Frank, when he got out of his berth. I scrambled out of mine to get on deck for help, but couldn't mount the ladder."

"I should rather think you couldn't mount a ladder," replied Frank, who was busy taking the splints off Ben's leg in order to re-set it. I must ask the mate to come down and lend me a hand with this limb. I shall never get the kink out of it by myself, and then you will be a cripple for life, and perhaps be altogether spoilt for a sailor."

"I don't want the mate to hear me tell you what

Dumby said to me, Frank. I will tell you something, but you must be sure to keep it secret, for it is about private concerns. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"I don't know much about them, Ben. I have seen a few of the sham sort in my time, but I never saw a real one. For all that I dare say ghosts are sometimes allowed to come to us when they have a sensible errand, but never for the sake of playing skylarking tricks. That's my opinion; but what do you ask such a scaring question for, just now?"

"Oh, something Dumby said to me, Frank. I will tell you all about it, or as much about it as I dare tell anybody."

"I wouldn't take much account of what he said, Ben; for I dare say he was half crazy with pain before he died. I am more afraid of his poor old body breeding a fever down here, than I am of his ghost interfering with us, and it's best to get him out of this pretty soon. He's dead, poor chap! and it won't matter a bit to him whether we heave him overboard to-day or to-morrow. I'll go aft and report his death to the captain."

"Mind you don't say anything to the captain about what I have told you, Frank."

"Why you haven't told me anything yet, mate. Any way, you needn't be afraid of my saying too much to the old man, for we are not very intimate companions."

CHAPTER VI.

“Then a plunge and a splash and all was o’er,
And the billows roll’d on as they roll’d before.”

—*The Sailor’s Grave.*

WHEN the *Wolf* got into smoother water, she was hove to, and then the captain and mate accompanied Frank to the forecastle to inspect the body of Dumby. In answer to questions from the captain, Ben told him that the deceased, in a fit of delirium, got out of his berth, and when trying to get into it again he burst a blood vessel and died. Ben also explained that he had called for help, but failed to make his voice heard by any one aft, until Frank came to cover up the scuttle. But he did not say anything about the commission Dumby had induced him to undertake, and he took care to conceal the manuscript under his mattress.

“Well, the poor fellow is dead, there is no doubt about that,” remarked the captain, after Ben had made his statement. “We can’t take him to Wellington for the coroner to look at him, because there is no telling when we shall get there if this breeze holds on, so he had better be hove overboard as soon as you can get him ready, Murray. Sew him up decently in his bedding, and put a few big lumps of coal at his feet—enough to sink him. That’s his chest, I suppose, lashed alongside his berth?”

"It was his chest, sir, but it is mine now," said Ben. "He told me I was to keep it, and all that is in it."

"Ah, that is an old-fashioned yarn, cook," replied the captain, with a significant shake of his head. "A dead man's gear is pretty safe plunder to seize if you can manage it; but that ancient game won't do on board the *Wolf* while I am master. Make a rope's end fast to the chest and haul it on deck, Murray," he added turning to the chief mate. "We must deliver it up to the water police at Wellington; in the meantime carry it aft and stow it under the cabin table. You had better make an entry in the log-book of the man's death. Died in a fit, you may say."

"I think he died from the damages he got to his inside when he was washed from the pumps," remarked Frank with respectful boldness.

"The cook says the man went off in a fit, so we will log it down at that. We can't hold an inquest on him; and though you think you know a rare lot about physic, you are not a regular doctor, Frank, so your private opinion goes for nothing at all."

"I'll stick to it, at any rate, captain. The cause of Dumby's death is crushed ribs, from being washed foul of the boat's iron davit; and the ship being overladen was the cause of the sea breaking on board and doing the damage. That's what I shall say if I am asked any questions about it."

"Well, you had better wait till you are asked about it; and don't give me any more of your sea-lawyer's gabble just now, or I shall perhaps give you something in exchange that you won't fancy. Now then, bear a hand, Murray! stitch him up snugly, and when you are ready sing out, and we will carry him on deck and launch him over the side with sailor-like decency.

That's all we can do for him now, poor fellow! See if you can find a Prayer-Book when you go aft, Murray. I fancy there is one in the medicine chest."

"I'll take my oath that Dumby gave his chest to me, captain," said Ben appealingly, as the mate was fastening a rope to it.

"Yes, I dare say you won't mind doing all that, cook. I have known a sailor man to take his oath for a smaller prize than a sea-chest full of clothes. You had better lie still, and coddle your broken bones, and never mind things that don't belong to you. Now then, hoist away, lads! heave ahoy! up she goes!"

Away went Dumby's chest up the scuttle, and was carried aft to the cabin. Soon afterwards the corpse was lifted up with decent care and consigned to the deep. Ben was vexed at the loss of the chest, which he considered as his own honestly acquired property, and he was hurt at the cool impudence of the captain in assuming that he would perjure himself for the sake of plundering a dead shipmate. When Frank came below again to turn in after many hours' hard work on deck, he was completely fagged; nevertheless he was eager to hear Ben's description of the closing scene in the life of Dumby, and all about the mysterious commission which Ben had undertaken at the urgent request of the deceased.

"I always thought that poor chap was high above the common run of fore-castle hands," said Frank, after Ben had told his exciting story. "But I never could make out what he was exactly, because he wouldn't speak out two words at a time. If I had been in your place, I would have got him to tell me a little more about himself while he had the use of his tongue. But I dare say this writing would tell us all about him.

There is a precious lot of it ! Will it be fair to read it, Ben ? ”

“ No, decidedly not ; I would not untie that string for a coal-basket full of gold-dust,” said Ben with unusual firmness. “ Never even hint at such a thing again to me, Frank. I will keep my vow if I am able to do so, for I don’t want to find out what I shall be liable to if I break it. But I wish I could get that other paper out of Dumby’s chest, and his Bible, which will tell us his real name. I don’t know the spot where to dig for the tin box in Fitzroy Gardens, without the plan or map that he spoke of. I wonder if the captain would let me look inside the chest just for a minute, if I were to explain to him a little about what I want to get at ? ”

“ Not he, Ben ; you may be sure of that, and you had better not ask him, or he will say you are a false-swearing thief, as he did an hour or two ago, and perhaps he will give it you in plainer English next time and a thump to help you to remember it.” After a few minutes’ pause, in which he seemed to be cogitating something in his mind, Frank added, “ Look you, Ben : if you like to say I shall go shares with you in this little job, whatever it turns up, I’ll lend you a hand to work it. Two heads are better than one, you know, especially in a matter of this curious sort ; and I have had more experience of the world than you have. It may be well for you to have a living witness of Dumby’s death alongside of you, or somebody might say you killed the man, and then stole his traps. Don’t you see, mate ? ”

“ Yes, Frank ; that is very true. I must go carefully to work, or I may get into trouble over this job. I have told you about it in a fair and straightforward way, because I have an idea that I can safely trust you ; but

I don't mean to tell any one else. You have been very kind to me since I have been disabled, and I shall never forget your care. You are a friend in need. If there is anything to be made out of this mysterious business, I shall be willing to share it with you ; but you must help me to perform what I have promised, however risky or troublesome it may be."

"All right, my boy ; that's a bargain, and here's my hand on it. You may trust an old man-of-war's man for being up to the mark on a pinch. I'll stick to you, Ben, like a dab of pitch to a soldier's jacket, and never be out of sight. I am rather stupid-headed just now, for I am nearly worn out with overwork ; but after I get a few hours' sleep I shall be lively again, and then I will begin to think about the best plan to go to work in this affair. If the thing is to be done at all, we'll manage it, never fear."

"It puzzles me how we are to get to Melbourne, first of all, and from there to England, for neither of us have any money."

"Don't trouble your head about that, mate. Fellows who can work on board ship can get to any land they like across the seas, just as naturally as fish could swim there. What I want to consider, first and foremost, is the safest way to get at Dumby's chest, to smuggle the things we want out of it. That's the first hard job to tackle. But I must sleep on it. I haven't had ten minutes' nap for twenty hours, so good-night, mess-mate."

Frank then rolled into his bunk and was soon fast asleep.

For the ensuing three days the crew of the *Wolf* had a hard time of it, for they had to tack up to Wellington against a strong breeze, and also had to keep the pumps

going pretty often. Nor was it a cheering time for the captain and mate. They naturally wished to take the vessel into port looking tidy aloft—all good seamen have that sort of professional pride in them ; but it was not possible for the crew to do necessary work about the rigging, or to scrub the paint work, when their services were so much needed at the pumps to keep the ship afloat. By the way, the owners of old ships are apt to overlook that fact, or they sometimes show dissatisfaction with the captains and officers, if their ships return home after a long voyage looking rather dirty about the hull, and the rigging slack and chafed, and the sails ragged. Officers of leaky ships have more to worry them than the dread of being drowned ; they usually have a grumbling crew to manage on the voyage, and sulky looking owners to face when they get into port.

During those busy days, Frank went below to attend to his sick shipmate as often as he could, and Ben was always glad to see him, for it was dreary to lie in the dark forecastle alone, and there was not light enough for him to see to read. He several times noticed a peculiarly knowing twinkle in Frank's gray eyes ; but to the question what he was thinking of that seemed to tickle him so pleasantly, Frank replied, "Wait till we come to an anchor, Ben, and then I'll tell you of a scheme that my brain is trying to work out, and I think it will help us to get the things we want out of Dumby's chest."

CHAPTER VII.

"Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble."

—*Shakespeare.*

AT length the *Wolf* arrived in Wellington Harbour, much to the relief of her almost exhausted crew. Soon after the anchor was dropped, the captain went on shore, taking four sailors with him in the gig, and they did not return until late at night. After tea the first and second mates were sitting in the cabin playing at chess, and there was no one else on board save Frank and Ben, who were down in the fore-castle.

"Now I will tell you of the scheme I have been planning in my brain for several days past," said Frank, after he had dressed Ben's limb and made him snug for the night. "The reason why I didn't tell you of it before, was because I knew you would be thinking over it every minute of the day, and you might perhaps giggle your broken limb out of set again. Besides, the other fellows in our mess would have wondered what you were grinning at always, and they might scent our plot and spoil it all. If I can carry out my scheme cleverly, I shall be able to overhaul Dumby's chest to-night; but if my cheatery should be found out, I can put it off as a bit of skylarking, and there will be no harm done, save perhaps getting my head punched, for there will be two to one against me."

"I cannot imagine what you are going to do, Frank."

"No, I warrant you would never guess it ; but I'll tell you all about it. Keep your ears wide open, for I must speak softly. I mean to play the ghost, and scare the mates out of the cabin. I have some gear that will disguise me nicely, and I shall make a likely looking sprite or goblin. I can make a noise through my own windpipe that would frighten a man-of-war's crew."

"Well, I certainly should never have guessed your scheme, Frank. But what if the mates use their revolvers?"

"Nobody ever thinks of shooting at a ghost—it isn't reasonable ; any way I must chance that part of it. I am pretty well used to being fired at with big guns though I have never been shot. I guess the mates will be too scared to think of their pistols. Neither of them were kind to Dumby, and they'll think he has come back to settle up old scores with them. But if they should be over plucky, I can sing out in time that I'm only playing off a lark."

"It is a hazardous lark, Frank, and one I should be afraid to play. I don't like even to joke about ghosts ; in fact, I don't want to have anything whatever to do with them, if I can possibly help it."

"Neither do I, Ben. They are serious things, you know, whether on sea or on shore. But this is a case of necessity. We must have that paper out of Dumby's chest somehow ; and if we don't get it to-night our chance is gone, for the chest will be taken on shore to-morrow, and perhaps we shall never see it again. If you were able to crawl aft, I would tumble overboard, as if by accident, and the mates would have to lower the boat to pick me up, and while they were doing so you might overhaul the chest ; but it is no good talking over

that plan, for you couldn't get aft if the ship was on fire. I have been thinking over the thing in all its bearings, and there is no other scheme than the one I tell you of, so here goes to try it. If I get found out, of course you needn't say you know anything about it, so the risk is all mine. And after all it isn't robbery that I am plotting. I only want to get a trifle or two out of Dumby's box ; and everything in it fairly belongs to you, only you can't show a written title, worse luck. Now mind you don't laugh, Ben."

Frank then besmeared his face and beard with a mixture of pipeclay and water, and tied a towel about his head ; he then put on a long white shirt with Dumby's drab oilskin over it. After a few more fanciful touches before the looking-glass, he walked aft barefooted, as noiselessly as a whiff of smoke, and peeped down the skylight at the two mates, and made a slight noise on the deck over their heads.

"What was that stirring on deck?" asked the chief mate.

"A rat, I suppose," said the other mate, who was intent on the game. "Go on, it's your move. I said check to your queen."

Frank then gave a low hollow moan, whereupon both men suspended their play and looked at each other.

"That wasn't a rat, Hawkins," said the chief mate. "Some stranger has come aboard to see what he can steal."

Frank then thrust his white face and part of his body down the skylight, and made a peculiarly weird noise—a sort of doleful blend of guttural and nasal sounds, impossible to describe. Ben could hear it as he lay in his bunk, and he wondered who taught Frank to make such an unnatural discord. It was dismal in the extreme.

"Oh, it's old Dumby's ghost!" exclaimed the second mate, starting up and rushing towards the cabin-stairs, closely followed by his superior officer. Frank slammed the cabin-door to, and ran away to the forecabin. When the mates came on deck they gave a hasty look around and up aloft; then they lowered the jolly-boat, and rowed twice round the ship, as if they were searching for something. They were just about to get on board again, when Frank stood on the mainrail, and screeched in a more ghastly tone than before, and showed his white figure in full length; at the same time he threw his arms out like danger signals. The mates did not stay long to gaze at him. They uttered some exclamations of astonishment or alarm, then out with their oars again, and pulled away like racers to a ship that was lying at anchor a short distance off. Frank then went into the cabin and opened Dumby's chest, of which Ben had given him the key; and, after some rummaging, he found the pencil sketch of Fitzroy Gardens, that he was in quest of, also the pocket Bible. He locked the chest again, and returned to the forecabin. After washing his face and putting off his ghostly disguise, he turned into his berth, and there he lay and enjoyed a merry laugh at the success of his scheme.

"That trick was cleverly done," remarked Ben, after he had laughed till his sore leg began to suffer from the shaking.

"You may trust an old sailor for knowing a thing or two out of the common way," replied Frank, putting on a philosophizing air, which he sometimes unconsciously assumed. "That is what I call a gentle appeal to the men's finer feelings, and you see how nicely it operated in our favour. I might have talked hard logic for a week, if I knew how, and they would never have seen

the lawfulness of letting me put a finger inside Dumbly's box ; and perhaps they would have hunted me forward with a belaying pin about my ears, if I had gone aft to argue the point with them. Officers in small crafts are usually testy sort of fellows, if you touch their dignity at all."

"You ran a great risk of being shot at, Frank."

"Not so much as you think, Ben. I know human nature a bit, especially as it shapes out on shipboard. The chief mate is a sailor every inch of him, as the saying is, and the second mate is pretty nigh as good, though he isn't much to look at. If I had pointed a seven-pounder carronade down the skylight, they would have been startled a bit no doubt, but not half so much scared as they were at that long white shirt that I wore, and the pipeclay that I daubed on my face ; anyhow, they would have stood to be blown into chips sooner than take to the boat and desert the ship. But a ghost is an uncommon or an unreal sort of thing, that sailors don't like to have any dealings with at all. Ha, ha ! I knew that scheme of mine would rouse the mates out of the cabin quicker than fire or water or gunpowder would do it. Sailors hate ghosts, especially the ghosts of their old shipmates."

"I don't believe that landsmen like them either, Frank."

"Perhaps not ; but landsmen in general are not so superstitious as seamen are. The long, lonesome night watches at sea help to breed strange fancies in a man's head, as I know from experience. One of these days, if you remind me, Ben, I will tell you a few true stories about sham ghosts that will amuse you. There is a pretty lot of ghost mummary carried on on shore, I daresay, besides what they do in the play-houses. But

“I should be a hypocrite if I were to scandalise others for trickery that I have just practised myself, so I had better stop that subject and talk about something better, unless you want to go to sleep.”

“Oh no, I can’t sleep now, Frank. Shall I tell you what I have been thinking about you, for several days past, as I have lain here all alone?”

“Yes, tell me if you like, shipmate. Your thoughts will do me no more harm if you tongue them out than they will if you keep them stirring in your own brain; and perhaps they may do me good to hear them. But hush! wait a bit, Ben; I hear a boat bumping alongside. The mates have picked up courage enough to come back, I daresay. Keep very quiet, I’ll blow the light out.”

“*Wolf*, ahoy!” shouted somebody at that moment. The hail was repeated again and again, but Frank lay still in his berth, and did not reply. Presently footsteps were heard on deck, and a bull’s eye lantern was put down into the forecabin, and a voice asked, “Below there! Where is your anchor watch?”

“Hallo! who is that?” cried Frank, feigning to be just awaked.

“Here, show yourself on deck. Where is the anchor watch?” asked an authoritative voice, which Frank recognised as belonging to the water police officer, for he had heard the voice before, to his sorrow.

“Aren’t the mates in the cabin, sir?” answered Frank drowsily.

“Go aft and see; and if they are there tell them to come forward to me.”

Frank accordingly went aft, and in a short time returned, and with an astonished air reported that the mates were not in the cabin.

"Is anybody there?" asked the officer.

"No, sir; nobody save my sick messmate down in his bunk in the forepeak."

"The forepeak is not in the cabin, is it, stupid head?"

Frank slyly chuckled to himself, and tried to look as if he was very stupid indeed. The captain and mates and several water policemen then came on board, all well armed; and a search was made throughout the ship. Frank kept close beside the searchers, and seemed anxious to hear who or what they were trying to find; whether they expected to catch a bolter from Sydney, or suspected contraband goods among the coals in the hold.

"Have you seen or heard anything on board the ship this evening?" asked the police officer, with a searching look at Frank.

"I did hear a queer sort of noise aft, at about eight bells."

"Were the mates in the cabin then?"

"Oh yes, sir. They were there then, sure enough."

"What was the noise that you heard like, at all?"

"Well, it wasn't a bit like singing, nor it wasn't like a fiddle, nor yet like——"

"There, that's enough of your gibberish. Go forward."

After a little private conversation between the police officer and the captain, the latter testily declared that it was all a yarn about the ghost. His mates could not have been drunk he was sure, because there was no grog on board the ship; but he suspected they had invented the story as an excuse to get on board the other ship, to have a glass or two. That opinion the captain plainly expressed, much to the disgust of the chief mate, who declared that he had never tasted grog in his life. An

angry scene ensued, and there would perhaps have been some fighting, but for the interference of the police officer.

When the police boat left the ship, the captain went forward and cross-questioned Frank about the ghost, which the mates still stoutly declared had hunted them out of the ship. Frank as positively maintained that he had not seen a ghost—in fact, that he had not seen anybody worse than himself till the water police sergeant and his crew came on board in such a flurry. The captain said the mates had no more pluck than little guinea-pigs, and again he expressed his disbelief in apparitions of all sorts. But in case there should be some skulking cut-throat fellows from the shore smuggled on board, he took the precaution to order one of the sailors to shake down for the night on the cabin table, and another one to keep watch at the skylight.

CHAPTER VIII.

“O what men dare do ! What men may do !
What men daily do ! not knowing what they do.”

—*Shakespeare.*

WHILE the *Wolf* lay in port discharging her cargo of coal, Ben could not go on shore on account of his broken leg, and Frank was easily persuaded to stop on board and keep him company. He said that although he felt a strong craving for a drinking spree, he had not the heart to leave a disabled messmate lying in his bunk all alone. One evening all hands went on shore except Frank, who was left in charge of the ship ; so he and Ben had a quiet time together, and could talk confidentially without fear of being overheard. After they had chatted over their future operations in Dumby's affairs as far as they could plan them, Frank reminded Ben that he was about to say something to him in an admonitory way, when the police boat came alongside and interrupted him on the night that the sham ghost scared the mates off. “Now is the time for you to tell me what you were hinting at so solemnly.”

“I remember what I was going to say, Frank, but I hardly like to say it now lest I should hurt your feelings. You have been as kind as a father to me, and I would not grieve you on any account.”

“I know you don't wish to grieve me, Ben, and that is the reason why you will not do it, say what you may to me. Out with what is in your mind. I'll listen to you,

never fear! I am sure it will be honest talk, and that never can do anybody real harm."

"Well, I had been thinking, as I lay here, of what you once told me of your unconquerable fondness for strong liquor, and I was going to remark that I wondered very much that you, Frank, with so much common-sense in your head, should be in the habit of getting drunk and squandering your hard earnings whenever you go on shore with money in your pockets."

"It's a way we have in the navy to 'drive dull care away,' as the old song says," replied Frank, with a forced smile. "That's what you were puzzling over, is it? Well, let me say, shipmate, I wonder that you should wonder at a habit of human nature that is as old as Noah, if not older. You must have lived among an innocent lot of souls before you became a sailor if you have not met with fellows who have the same ancient propensity, which clings to me like barnacles on a mooring buoy. Do you mean to tell me that you never had a liking for the peculiar inward tickle of a glass of grog, Ben? Come now, be honest. Did you never get fuddled a little bit? Speak out like a man. No fear of my blaming you for it."

"I tell you truly, Frank, that I have no more liking for strong drink of any sort than I have for snuff, or for cayenne pepper to flavour my pea soup. If any one were to offer me an open snuff-box, I should perhaps take a pinch for fashion's sake, and sneeze over it; but I would never think of spending a penny on snuff for my own use, nor on cayenne pepper either. I can safely say that it has not cost me a shilling for strong drink all the days of my life. I don't see any fun in throwing away money for stuff that I have no fancy for. I would far sooner have a quart of milk than a gallon of rum."

"If that is the case, I am not surprised that you don't understand why I like to get on the spree now and then, Ben. None but those who have had a little experience of the thing can know anything about the cravings that beset a poor fellow who is possessed by the drinking fiend. I have not often met with a character like you in the course of my cruising—a regular sober man and not a tectotaller. I wish you would tell me how it is that you have not picked up a taste for the befooling stuff that is leading half the folks in the world by the nose."

"Perhaps one reason why it has not led me in that way is because I never smelt grog, to my knowledge, up to the age of fourteen. My mother and grandmother looked well after my early training, and set me a good example. I was bound apprentice to a sober master, who kept a keen eye over me in the workshop and after work was over also. I never saw grog in his house, and as I was not allowed the run of the streets at night, I had not much to tempt me from habits of strict sobriety. I had very little money of my own when I was an apprentice, and never had much to spare since I have been out of my time. Now I have given you the main reasons, I suppose, why I do not care for intoxicating liquor."

"I hope you will have sense enough to keep clear of it for life."

"No fear of that, Frank. I have no more craving for it than I have for physic; and if all the bunks in the forecastle were wine bins, I perhaps should not taste it once a month, if I ever tasted it at all."

"My word! if I knew there was a single bottle of intoxicating drink within my reach, I could not be easy for a minute till I had uncorked it, and then the stuff would all go down my throat and I should crave for

more. Nothing would come amiss to me that I could get hold of, from ladies' sweet wine to new rum or fiery arrack, and I should keep on drinking till I got the horrors, unless I was looked after and the grog was kept out of my way."

"Drink has a sad power over you, Frank, and I cannot understand it. If, as you say, a little grog does you good, surely you might take a little and then cork the bottle up for the day? It is a simple effort of the will."

"Ay, simple as it looks to you, Ben, I could not do it, no more than I could stop my breathing for a day. I could more easily go for a week without victuals. If I were to promise you now, while I am quite sober, that I would not uncork a bottle for a month or two, I would keep my word like a man; but if I had only tasted a spoonful of the stuff beforehand, you could not coax me to make such a promise, even if it would save my poor old mother's life, and I should go at the bottle till all the grog was gone, even if I knew that the devil was pouring it out for me. That's as true as I am a living sinner, and I can't help it, worse luck."

"It seems dreadfully mysterious to me, Frank. How do you account for the infatuation? You have often thought of it, I daresay?"

"Thought of it, yes, times out of number. I firmly believe Satan himself is at the bottom of it. He has a willing crew always at his beck and call—perhaps a thousand times more imps and humbugs than there are seamen and marines in the British navy; and they take all sorts of shapes and characters, from learned lawyers and parsons to ugly goblins and smart girls. A squad of them are wide awake and busy day and night, tempting poor weak mortals to go to hell by the short cut of self-murder, and the surest way they can do it is to get them

to drink to madness. The grog-imps are too cunning to try to tempt me in an off-hand way, because they know I should sheer off from them directly. It would be no use for any of them to whisper in my ear, when I am in my sober senses, 'Frank, go and hang yourself to the fore-rigging;' or 'Frank, jump overboard,' or 'swallow a dose of quick poison out of the medicine chest.' But they have many times lured me on to drink hard, and then they have tried to coax me to kill myself when I have been just off a spree."

"You have imagined they were trying to tempt you, Frank."

"Well, say it was imagination if you like; but it seemed awfully real to me, and I am not sure that it wasn't real. I not only heard the whisperings of the fiends, but I could see them as plainly as I now see that lamp burning. Depend upon it, Ben, the devil is a terrible reality, and not a mere fancy of picture-mongers; and I am sure he has a frightful power for mischief over poor mortals who do not know how to resist him. I can't be argued out of that belief by anybody, for I have felt his influence in a way too shocking to express in any words that I know."

"I suppose you mean to say that you have had *delirium tremens*?"

"Yes, I have, worse luck. I know more than I should like to tell you of that horrible suffering which you call by such a learned name. Sailors call it the horrors, or blue devils—they can't find a name too ugly for it. You speak of it as if it were scarcely as bad as a toothache or a cracked toe-nail, but I can tell you that it often claws a man's soul out of him. Yes, take my word for it, Ben, the devil is an awful reality; and since he first hoofed his way into our world to breed evil and mischief,

he has never hit upon any scheme that has helped him so much as teaching mankind to drink to excess. Grog, from the still-worm, has enticed more poor souls to his hooks than any of the other tempting baits he throws out of his infernal galley. He has half hooked me several times, and I daresay he thinks he will have my poor miserable soul in his clutches on one of my pay days."

"If I were you, Frank, I would never touch that treacherous bait again," said Ben, in an earnest tone. "I would not go within the smell of it."

"Ah, it is easy for you to talk, and, thanks to your sober training, it would be easy for you to stand clear of the thing, but it is not so with me. You talk of my common-sense being a stay or a safeguard to me, which shows that you don't know much about the clawing power of the drinking fiend. Why, the most superior sense in human nature is as useless to cope with him as those rotten shrouds were to stay our mainmast in the breeze we fell in with off the mouth of Cook's Straits, There was a doctor in a ship that I sailed in once, as clever a fellow as ever studied physic, and I saw him raving mad from the effects of drink. 'Get me a glass of gin, Frank!' he shouted to me on the night he died, when I was keeping watch over him in his cabin. 'I must not give it to you, doctor,' said I. 'You must—you shall. For pity's sake give it to me, Frank!' he cried. 'It will kill you, sir, and I shall be as bad as a murderer,' said I solemnly. 'Give it me! Give it me at once!' he shrieked, and I shall never forget his awful look. 'If it sends me to hell I must have it.' What do you think of that for a dying speech from a man who was educated at a college? A really clever doctor, who knew ten times more than either you or I do of the

curious ins and outs of the human frame, and what is good or bad for it. Don't talk to me about the power of a drunkard's reason after that ! I tell you, Ben, mere common-sense is no safeguard against the drinking devil."

"It is very shocking ; and it makes me tremble to think of it. Now let me tell you plainly, Frank, it is the dread I feel lest you should get tipsy and let out all you know about Dumby's affairs, that has influenced me to speak to you in this way. I am very uneasy about it."

"I guessed as much, Ben, as soon as you broached the subject. But you needn't be afraid of me. If I promise you on the word of a man that I will not taste grog for a certain time, you may trust me safely. I have made that promise twice in my lifetime, and I stuck to it like a true British tar. Once I made it to the chaplain of the *Hazard*, and at another time to the gunner on board the *Victoria* Government brig, that used to be a regular cruiser on this coast."

"But you must have broken your promises, Frank ; for I have heard you say that you have been drunk many times since you left the navy."

"Ay, hundreds of times, I am ashamed to say ; but I didn't break my word for all that. Twice I promised not to taste grog for six months, and each time I kept my promise faithfully. I was tempted on all sides by my shipmates, some of whom made bets that I would break down, but I held out to the last hour of the six months—ay, to the very last minute."

"How did you get on during those months of total abstinence ?"

"Get on ! why like a ship with a fair wind and smooth sea. I seldom thought about grog, and never had any downright hard cravings for it until my time

was nearly up. Then I begun to feel uneasy ; and as soon as eight bells struck on the night I was free, I broached a bottle of ship's rum and had a reg'lar soaking, all that watch below got blind drunk and fightable."

"And you felt miserable after you got sober again, no doubt?" said Ben, with a sort of shuddering curiosity, like listening to a tale of murder.

"I was a little queer next day, but nothing to signify. One bottle of unadulterated rum wouldn't make me shake much ; and my conscience was easy about it because I had not broken my word. But I have been miserable enough after a long spree on shore ; and such misery as you cannot conceive of, because you never had the least taste of it. It is not a trifle that would make a man jump from the fore yard-arm of a frigate into a rough sea, you may be sure."

"Did you actually do that, Frank?"

"I did so ; and the ship was at the time under double-reefed topsails. I was at the lee earing, helping to reef the fore-course, when I saw the devil sitting on the stern-sail boom-iron close to me."

"Had you been drinking hard before that?"

"My word I had ! I spent forty pounds of prize money in eight days, from Sunday to Sunday, and I was not sober an hour all that time. When I went on board again I was not fit for duty ; still I passed muster, for I was a favourite with most of the officers. I had an awful night of horror, such as I shall never forget if I live till I am a hundred years old. The next day the ship sailed from Port Jackson ; and a strong gale sprang up the same evening. I was at my post on the yard overhauling the lee earing, when the devil came beside me and whispered coaxingly, 'Heave yourself over-

board, Frank, and you will get out of your misery before the hands have done reefing the sail. Drowning is an easy death—only a few struggling kicks and it is all over.”

“You fancied something said that to you, Frank?”

“Well, as I said before, call it fancy if you like, Ben, but the voice seemed shockingly real to me at the time. A thought glared into my mind—like a flash-light—just then, ‘What is the short struggle of drowning compared with the horrible palsy I feel in every limb, and blue fire in my brain, and my conscience cursing me? I’ll try what death is like!’ so I gave a spring and down I went, just clear of the fore chains. Directly I splashed into the waves I would have given the world to be on board the frigate again, and I swam for my life. The water roaring in my ears seemed to me like a thousand fiends hissing at me, and I remember I howled like a mad dog. The ship was luffed into the wind, a lifeboat was lowered, and I was picked up more than half dead. But the awful horrors I suffered for a week afterwards would make your hair stand on end if I could describe them to you. To be mopped all over with hot pitch would be nothing to it. I should certainly have killed myself, by some means, to escape from the torment if I had not been closely watched. Oh what a time of misery that was! horrible! horrible!”

“It makes me shudder to listen to you, Frank. I suppose you did not taste grog for a long time after you got over that suffering?”

“I did though. I took my allowance of two tots of grog a day as soon as I came out of the hospital, and would have drunk more if I could have got it. My craving for it seems to be never satisfied when it is set a-going.”

"Well, well ! the grog mystery puzzles me more than ever," remarked Ben sadly. "One would think that such horrors as you describe, and such a narrow escape from self-murder—the most hopeless of crimes, ought to have been a warning to you for the rest of your life. Why, if a little idiot child were to burn its fingers at a hot stove, it would have sense enough not to go near the stove again."

"You are right there, Ben. And even a pig would have natural gumption enough not to put its snout a second time into a bucket of scalding hot skouse. Still there are thousands of full-grown men and women in the world to-day, and I am one of them, I am sorry to say, who could not resist getting dead drunk if they only had liquor enough at hand—ay, and they would keep on drinking till they had the horrors. Often and often I have cursed a bottle with all the curses I could think of, and at almost the next minute I have put it to my mouth and half emptied it at one draught. That's a sad fact. Heigho ! so it is with me, and there is no help for it that I know of. Poor old Frank Shorter is doomed to be swamped by it, as millions of other wretched souls have been. Poverty through life and awful misery hereafter is my lot, or my fate, and all through my unhappy fondness for grog."

"But you said just now that you could abstain from it if you made up your mind to do so, Frank."

"I could for six months, Ben ; but I don't think I could hold out longer, unless I were out of reach of grog altogether, same as I am in this old craft."

"If you could hold out for six months, surely you could do so for life, if you made up your mind to it, Frank."

"There you make a mistake again, my friend ; and it

shows, as I said before, that you know nothing about the gripping influence of the grog fiend on old toppers. If I say, on the word of a man, that I will not drink anything intoxicating for six months, the tempter sheers off for a time and leaves me alone, and I go along comfortably enough. I dare say he thinks to himself that he is sure of me by-and-by, and he need not bother himself about me for awhile, and away he goes to look after some fresh victims, perhaps some boys or girls who are just leaving their homes to begin life, and they have not been thoroughly trained to do without grog, or been warned of its treacherous nature. But if I were to say that I would not taste it again as long as I live, I believe the fiend would be at me directly with all his might, for fear he should lose me altogether, as he has lost thousands of honest teetotallers; and then I could no more resist his influence than I could help going to the bottom of the sea if I were to drop overboard with a tiller chain coiled round my body. The devil is too strong for a poor fellow like me to fight with."

"Suppose you promise me that you will not taste grog again for twelve months, Frank. Will you try that experiment?"

"I am afraid to do it, mate. I would almost as soon die as break my word to a friend, if I gave it seriously, and I don't think the evil one would leave me alone for a whole year. He would be at me at once, and perhaps coax me to skulk ashore to-night to some of the drinking shops yonder, and leave you lying here with your broken leg; and then I should never dare to show my face to you again, and there is no saying what would become of me. But I will tell you what I will do, Ben. I promise you, on the word of a man, that I will not taste grog until we have managed poor Dumby's affairs

all square. I can see that you are afraid of my breaking out and spoiling that business for you, so I will set your mind at ease on that score. Here is my hand upon it, and you may trust me. We shall have that job over in six months, I think."

"You faithfully promise me that you will not taste intoxicating liquor until we have delivered Dumby's parcel into proper hands, do you?" said Ben, taking Frank's horny hand and gazing earnestly in his face.

"I do promise, Ben, on the word of a man; and sooner than break that promise I would suffer this right hand of mine to be chopped off with a Maori's stone hatchet."

CHAPTER IX.

“Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife.”

—Gray.

AFTER the *Wolf’s* cargo was discharged at Wellington, as there was no charter offering that the captain thought it would be profitable to accept, he took in ballast and sailed again for Newcastle.

Ben was off duty that trip, and was confined to his berth with his broken limb. He would far sooner have been at work in the galley; and the crew all agreed that his being on the sick list was unlucky for them, as the negro cook, who was shipped at New Zealand, didn’t know how to keep his coppers and saucepans clean, let alone know how to cook rations fit for English sailors to eat. Frank continued to be very attentive to his disabled shipmate; and as the weather was fine during the voyage, Ben was sufficiently recovered when they arrived at Newcastle to be able to walk ashore with the aid of crutches, which he made for himself out of a couple of broomsticks. Ben and Frank took up their abode at a seamen’s lodging-house near the market-place in Newcastle; and each day when the weather was favourable they would stroll down to the waterside, and while away time in watching the operation of shipping coal, by the steam cranes, on board the many large ships and steamers that were then lying at the wharves of that busy port.

"I'll tell you what I am thinking, mate," remarked Frank one day, as they sat on a spar opposite to a large ship, which was being rapidly loaded. "Sitting here and looking on, like rich owners, is ever so much easier than if we were trimming cargo in the hold of that clipper, or even than if we were pickaxing coal from the dark insides of those hills yonder, as many hundreds of able-bodied fellows are doing this sunshiny morning. No doubt it is nice to have a rest for awhile from the slavish work of a foremast hand in a leaky old collier, still a man soon gets tired of lolling about doing nothing, especially when he sees everybody busy around him. It isn't natural for an idle sailor to feel lively, any more than it is for a fat pig to frisk about like a young goat."

"I dare say you find the time more tedious than I do, because I have my damaged leg to keep me from getting drowsy," replied Ben. "But don't you think you had better take another short voyage in the *Wolf*, Frank? By the time you come back I shall perhaps be all right again and fit for sea."

"No, Ben, I won't leave you while you are a cripple," said Frank firmly. "Anyway, I wouldn't go in the *Wolf* again, if they'd offer me the second mate's berth. I have had enough of that old box, and I'll let some other unlucky chap have a turn in my berth. But I'll tell you what I have been thinking of for several days past. You know there are too many rowdy sailors in our present lodging-house for it to be either quiet or comfortable; besides, I don't see why we should live within sound of those rumbling coal trains all day and all night too, to make us fancy we are always in a roaring gale of wind. We may just as well smell bush flowers as coal dust—we have had enough of that grimy

stuff on board ship—and the singing of the wild birds will be a rare sight more cheering to us than the ghastly screeching of those locomotive engines, to say nothing of other disturbances which we can't expect a big city to be free from. I've been told that we can steam up yon fine river for thirty miles, as far as Morpeth, and can see farmhouses, and green stuff growing, all the way ; and there are two other beautiful rivers forking off from the Hunter, some distance up, which we can have a look at if we like, for steamers ply up and down pretty often. Now suppose we take a trip up the Hunter, and see if we can find lodgings that will suit us better than the noisy shop yonder, where we have left our traps ? What do you say, mate ? ”

Ben cheerfully acquiesced in the proposal without a word of argument ; so the next day they started by a river steamer which landed them at the pretty township of Raymond Terrace, about twenty miles from Newcastle. As the steamer screwed her way up the winding river, they often expressed delight at the varied scenery on either bank ; but soon after they had landed at their final stopping-place, their admiration knew no bounds, and they resolved that they would make that happy-looking place their home for awhile.

Raymond Terrace is decidedly the prettiest town on the lower Hunter River. It is situated close to the junction of the Williams River with the Hunter. Its name is somewhat misleading. The place certainly looks less like a terrace in its improved state, than it did when it first received its name, half a century ago. Then the background was covered with trees and scrub, and only the crescent-shaped foreshore of the river was cleared. Viewed from the river the town has an inviting appearance, especially to any one of homely tastes, who

has escaped for awhile from the dust and din of the busy metropolis, and can appreciate a peaceful rural retreat. As most of the traffic of Raymond Terrace is carried on by way of the river, the streets, with the exception of the leading thoroughfares, are covered with grass, which adds to the beauty of the town as well as to its quietude. The green hillocks in the background have a very picturesque appearance. A few villa residences are to be seen half hidden in flower gardens and orangeries, and some pretty churches complete the landscape. The business parts of the town are nearer to the river.

Ben and Frank had no difficulty in finding respectable lodgings, and they soon found that they had made an advantageous change. There were many pleasant walks in the vicinity of the town, and each day they used to stroll about together, sometimes farther than was good for Ben's weak leg. Their favourite walk was to a grassy hill in the reserve, which commanded a grand panoramic view of the country for a circuit of more than twenty miles, with the rivers Hunter and Williams winding their placid way, past many enticing looking homesteads, with vineyards and orangeries, and extensive fields of maize, lucerne, and other farm products. The cultivated land extended far away to the base of the high mountain ranges in the distance, a prospect that would delight the eyes of an English farmer.

"Well, this is about the nicest place I've seen in all my roaming on shore, in this part of the world," said Frank, as he and Ben lay on the soft grass of their favourite hill, one sunny morning. "I do think if I might be allowed to build myself a little bark hut on this spot, I'd be content to live here all my days, and I

should wish to be laid, after I am dead, in that peaceful-looking cemetery in the hollow yonder, where the birds are always singing and the wild flowers are always growing, because nobody seems to meddle with them."

"Ah, that would be nice, Frank. No boatswain's whistle to bother us, and no fear of green seas breaking our bones then."

"You are right, mate. We should always be among the smooth green grass, and could sleep without rocking. I think I shall always remember the few weeks I have spent in Raymond Terrace, as the most restful part of my life; and I don't think I ever fared so well before. The new milk and eggs, and beautiful fresh butter, and home-made loaves, and rice puddings, are good rations. I could make a rare song about them, that would do well to sing when walking round the capstan."

"You ought also to remember the fruit—the grapes, and peaches, and sugar melons, and oranges—there is poetry in them too, isn't there, Frank?"

"Yes, no doubt there is, Ben; and we can refresh our fancy with them when we are eating our hard biscuit and fat pork at sea."

"And we won't forget these remarkably fine mosquitoes, when we want something lively to think of, Frank."

"Ha, ha! They won't let us forget them this morning, anyway," rejoined Frank, as he whisked a few of the stinging pests off his neck. "But it will be lucky for us if we never get any worse backbiters than these merry trumpeters."

"They are more stinging this morning than I ever felt them before; and I feel my conscience stinging me more than usual, for staying here idling now that I am

well enough to work ; and I am wasting your time also, Frank. It is a week since I threw away my crutches, so I have no longer a cripple's excuse to shirk duties. The mosquitoes seem to be poking their horns into me to make me start off."

"I believe that lazy sailors always get something to stir them up and make them feel uneasy. As you are able to walk now, Ben, perhaps we ought to make a start out of this to-morrow. Our money wouldn't hold out many weeks, careful as we are. I propose that we go to Newcastle again, and try if we can get a ship to work our passage to Melbourne ; then we must search for the tin box which poor Dumby told you about—that's the main thing we have to think of. After we have found it we must get a ship for London, and deliver the box to the person it is directed to. That's our course, as clearly as I can see it. Let us go and square up for our lodgings, and pack up our traps."

On the following day Ben and Frank left their snug quarters, where they had enjoyed themselves so thoroughly, and returned to Newcastle. A few days afterwards they got a working passage to Melbourne in a collier barque, the captain of which had sailed with Frank many years before, as an apprentice boy. On their arrival at Williamstown he kindly gave Ben and Frank a note of introduction to Mrs. Blake, a widow lady, who lived in a little cottage of her own at Carlton, one of the populous suburbs of Melbourne. Mrs. Blake had a double-bedded room vacant, and she agreed to board and lodge the two friends at a moderate rate. They forthwith removed their chests from the 'barque and took possession of their comfortably furnished apartment.

"Here we are then, Ben, as snug as two sloops in a

dry dock. No turning out to-night to work the pumps or to cobble up old stranded rigging," said Frank, as he sat on his chest in their little room on that evening after tea. "What is to be our next movement? You are commander-in-chief, you know."

"I think we ought, first of all, to go and try if we can dig up this long-talked-of tin box, and we may as well set about it directly. We have nothing else to do, and it's a fine night for a walk. Do you know Fitzroy Gardens, Frank?"

"Not I, mate. When I was in this part of the world before, Melbourne wasn't much bigger than a Maori village, and the country all around it was either bush or swamp, so I am almost as much out of my reckoning as I should be if you were to drop me down in the middle of China or Japan."

"We can both speak plain English, Frank, so come along. I dare say we shall find the gardens easily enough. Where is Dumby's chart? We must have that."

"I have the chart under the lining of my hat; but I tell you I'd rather go about this business by daylight," said Frank, with a serious look.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I am not afraid of anything that a man may fairly see and grapple with; but this seems to me like body-snatching work. We don't know what is in the box. It may contain somebody's murdered bones, and I don't want to have anything to do with such things for love or money."

"Pooh! bones indeed! What queer fancies you sometimes get in your head, Frank! It is not a leaden coffin we are going after. Dumby told me it was a *small* tin box. I wish I had asked him what was in it,

but I daresay it merely contains private letters or something of the sort. I am not afraid to go for it alone, so if you like you can stay here till I come back. Give me the chart."

"No, no, Ben ; you shan't go by yourself if I know it. Fair halves was our bargain ; and if I am to share the profit of the job I'll share the risk with you, whatever it may be. If we should meet Dumby's ghost, I don't suppose he will meddle with us, as we are doing his bidding honestly. Hallo ! what's that row about ?"

At that moment there was a sharp rapping at the front door, with something which sounded like the handle of an umbrella. The rapping continued until the door was opened by the landlady, and then a female voice was heard to exclaim, "Oh let me in, mother ! There is an impudent man coming ! He has followed me all the way from Spring Street." In another minute there was a slight scuffling, and a man's voice was heard in the front parlour, adjoining the room which Frank and Ben occupied.

"I think there is a pirate come on board of us. Stand by for a sea-fight," whispered Frank.

"Hush, Frank ! Let us hear if our landlady wants any help." They then overheard Mrs. Blake say, "You have mistaken the character of my house, sir, and I request you to go outside again."

"Aw—hope I don't intrude, ma'am," replied a masculine voice, in the drawling tone which is affected by certain fast men of the period. I saw this young lady on Sunday, at the Cremorne Gardens—aw—and I——"

"Indeed you are mistaken, sir. My daughter is seldom absent from our church choir on Sundays, and you never saw her at Cremorne at any time. Please to leave my house at once."

"Aw—a good girl to go to church regularly. And this pretty chorister is your daughter, is she? I should like to hear her sing just now,—you have a piano, I see. Aw—pray don't get out of temper, my good lady. I only want to spend an hour or two in a quiet, social way. Will you allow your servant to fetch a bottle of wine from the hotel round the corner, or some brandy if you prefer it," he added, drawing out his purse.

"If you do not leave my house instantly I will send for a policeman," replied the widow resolutely. "How dare you insult me in this way?"

"I shall be sorry to offend you, mother; and I want to please your daughter if I can. I wish she wouldn't look so coy. If you knew who I am, you would be proud to entertain me in your cottage. May I ask your sweet daughter to tell me her name? What is it, my dear? It ought to be a pretty name."

"Leave my house this moment! I insist upon it."

"Come, come, old dame! you mustn't talk to me as if I were a common loafer. I may put you into a house twice as large as this if you are civil. Would you like to be my tenant, pretty one?"

"Take your hands off my daughter, or I will shriek for the police!" vociferated Mrs. Blake, whose maternal feelings were thoroughly aroused. "It is infamous conduct to force yourself into my house in this ruffianly way. You would not dare to do it if I had a husband to protect me. Such men as you are a disgrace to our city."

"I'll go and punch that fellow's head," said Frank, who had been standing with his fists clenched during the exciting affair in the next room. "The prowling rascal!"

"Wait awhile, Frank. Let him go out quietly if he

will. I think the old lady is a match for him. Hush! let us hear what the rogue says."

"Aw—it seems to me that I am not a welcome visitor to-night, so I will go," said the man. "I wish you good-night, mother. I won't kiss you, because you are so snappish, but I will kiss your pretty daughter before I go. Come, little pouting miss, give me one kiss. It is no use resisting me, you must and shall."

From the widow's loud outcries for police, it was clear that the man was again behaving rudely to the girl.

"I can't stay here any longer and hear that villian insulting two helpless women, so here goes to board him," exclaimed Frank, as he opened the dividing door, and the next instant the impudent intruder was lying with his head under the table, having being knocked down by a blow from Frank's hard fist.

"Pick yourself up, mister, and get out of this, or I may knock you to pieces, for you've made me savage. Out you go this instant, or you'll soon be sorry you didn't make more haste. And perhaps you'll remember my knuckles the next time you try to disgrace a respectable home."

The man got up and aimed a blow at Frank with a walking-stick, whereupon he sprang forward and wrenched the stick from the man, and beat him with it until he roared murder. Frank then pushed him out of the house.

"There, go and lie down in the gutter," said Frank, as he closed the door. "Don't cry, ma'am," he added in a soft tone to the widow, who was in a state of great excitement.

"I am very thankful indeed to you gentlemen. I do not know what I should have done if you had not been

in the house," said Mrs. Blake, addressing her new lodgers.

"If that fellow had known that you had a couple of able seamen in your back room he would perhaps have looked for his game to-night in some other preserve. Cheer up, ma'am, there is no harm done. Don't fret any more, my girl. Your tormentor will not come back any more to-night, I'll engage. Hallo! what's this? He has left his money-bag behind him, and I don't think he meant to do it," added Frank, and at the same time he picked up a purse that was lying under the table.

"Throw it out after him, if you please," said Mrs. Blake.

Frank opened the door to do so, but the man had gone away. "He's off like a half-hooked shark," said Frank, laughing. "What is to be done with his purse? There are several sovereigns in it. I should like to make him swallow their value in physic. Here, missis, you had better stow this money away in the coal-box or the dust-bin, till he sends for it."

"I will not touch it," said Mrs. Blake, with honest disgust. "I think the best plan will be to send it to the police-station directly, but I do not know who to send with it. I am afraid to leave the house myself, for my nerves are quite upset."

"Don't worry about it, ma'am. My friend and I are going towards Melbourne, and we will call at the police-station and leave the money. We ought to have sent the owner of it there." Frank then put the purse into the breast-pocket of his coat, and he and Ben returned to their room to prepare for their visit to the Fitzroy Gardens.

"This is a rare start off for our first night on shore,

Ben. I wonder what will come next. It is fortunate for the poor old lady and her daughter that we were close at hand, or there is no saying what that wicked rogue would have done, for such fellows have no more consciences than cannibals."

"I quite pitied the poor girl," said Ben, softly.

"Yes, I thought you were pitying her all the while the fight was going on."

"You didn't want any of my help, you know, Frank; and I was only sheltering the timid maid from chance blows from the end of your stick, for you were laying it about you like a flail. I felt it to be my duty to shield her, and I'd do it again if need be."

"No doubt you would, messmate. But you needn't look so serious over it. I was only joking you a bit. It is natural for a young fellow to pity a pretty girl more than he pities her mother, and sure enough I didn't want your help to thrash that prowling chap. I could settle with two such as he any morning before breakfast. Though he is a great bull-headed fellow, there is no more strength or stamina in him than there is in a mummy or a stuffed Guy Fawkes. You saw how he shivered and shook when we first popped into the room. He is what you may call a regular grog-soaker, Ben."

"I don't think he was drunk, Frank."

"Perhaps not. Fellows like him don't often get downright drunk, as I used to do; but I'll warrant he drinks as much as would poison me and you too. Any one with only half a nose could tell that. Now then, shipmate, get on your monkey jacket and we will go and find the police-station first and foremost, and get rid of this rascally purse; and then we will go and search for the tin box, which I hope is an honest con-

cern, then I don't care a whiff what's inside it. I wish it was a daylight job, that's all."

Just then there was a loud knocking at the front door. "Hallo! has Mr. Bully come back for his change, I wonder?" said Frank, laughing. The next minute their room door was pushed open, and in walked two policemen, and the man whom Frank had so unceremoniously ejected from the house. He had a wet bandage on his nose.

"That's the ruffian, policeman. I'll swear to him," said the man excitedly, and he pointed to Frank. "That's the fellow. I charge him with a murderous assault and robbing me of my purse."

"It is my duty to arrest you," said one of the policemen, at the same time he collared Frank, while the other policeman proceeded to handcuff him, with more haste than tenderness.

"Hold on a bit, friends! Don't gibbet your prisoner before he is found guilty," said Frank, with honest boldness. I confess I gave that man a punching, and he deserved twice as much as he got; but as for robbing him, that's another matter altogether, and I deny it. There isn't a bit of truth in that yarn, and the fellow who accuses me knows he is dealing falsely."

The policeman replied by cautioning Frank not to say anything that might criminate himself, and then they led him off to the lock-up. He was there searched, and the purse was found in his pocket. Ben followed to the lock-up, and loudly proclaimed Frank's innocence, but was told that he had better attend at the police-office the next day, and say all he had to say in favour of the prisoner. He returned to his lodgings, where he found Mrs. and Miss Blake in great distress at the sudden mishap which had befallen their lodger, through his

kind interference in their behalf. Ben sat up till a late hour that night trying to allay the anxiety of his landlady and her daughter; and when he retired to bed, he lay awake a long time thinking of the disgustingly profligate disposition of the man, who could wantonly insult such a well-behaved, modest looking girl as Annie Blake.

CHAPTER X.

“When Fortune means to men most good,
She looks upon them with a threatening eye.”

—*Shakespeare.*

FRANK was taken to the central police-court, Melbourne, the next morning, and charged with feloniously assaulting and robbing Mr. Adam Leary. The bruises on the prosecutor's face were direct evidence of the assault, and the finding of the purse in Frank's pocket seemed to be equally conclusive proof of the robbery. Frank said, as they allowed him to speak for himself, he would make a straightforward story of the facts of the case. He honestly confessed that he had beaten Mr. Leary, and said he would be ashamed to call himself a man if he had not punished him for his scandalous conduct to two helpless women; but the robbery was all nonsense. He then explained that he had found the purse under Mrs. Blake's parlour table, after the prosecutor left; and he was, at his landlady's request, going to carry it to the police-station, when he was taken into custody. Ben's evidence corroborated Frank's statement to a tittle; nevertheless the bench, after a short deliberation, committed him for trial, and as he had no substantial bail to offer, he was forthwith sent to prison.

Ben was sorely grieved for the misfortunes of his friend, though he felt a little comfort from Frank's parting words, as he was being led out of the police-

court, "Cheer up, Ben! You know I am not guilty, though they are walking me off to gaol. If I get fair play I shall soon be at liberty again, never fear." The concern of Mrs. and Miss Blake was truly pitiable to behold, for one of the daily newspapers had incautiously stated that the assault and robbery took place in a disorderly house, into which the prosecutor had been inveigled by a girl. If the gentleman who reported that case could have witnessed the mental sufferings which his unhappy version of it caused the widow and her daughter, he would certainly have regretted that he had not been more careful with his report. Many other sensitive persons have winced, and some have been almost ruined by a few damaging lines written by a too hasty hand, to be set up in type for thousands of eyes to scan. Public writers should use their pens with care and judgment, and also with justice and mercy.

The anxiety which Ben felt for his unlucky shipmate, was in some measure mixed with concern for his own interest. In the first place, it would delay his previously formed plans, as the assizes would not be held for nearly three months, and with the utmost economy his money would not hold out for that time, unless he could get employment of some kind. He was bound, both by law and conscience, to stay and give evidence for Frank's defence—indeed, the idea of deserting his friend in distress never once entered his mind. He had confidence in the triumph of justice in a general way, but in this particular case, he had troublesome misgivings that the testimony of the wealthy prosecutor, together with the train of correlative circumstances, would overbalance the evidence of Frank's witnesses. The advisability of employing counsel for his defence also occurred to Ben's mind, but he had to abandon the idea, when he

was assured that learned counsel always expected their fees in advance, and that they never gave credit. He had encouraged hopes of pecuniary advantage in the fulfilment of Dumby's mysterious commission, but how to manage it in the event of Frank's conviction he did not know. A living witness to authenticate his statement of Dumby's death, and other particulars, was essentially necessary ; in short, he had scarcely courage enough to attempt to carry out the work by himself, lest his own personal liberty might be imperilled ; for he was wholly unacquainted with Dumby's antecedents, and was also ignorant of the contents of the packet of manuscript, and the tin box which he had not yet ventured to search for. It was natural enough, under all these circumstances, for Ben to feel dispirited. After pondering the matter over for several days and nights, he resolved that he would seek employment on shore for a few weeks, and thereby perhaps raise enough money for Frank's defence at his approaching trial. But he soon found, as many other men have done, that in the busy city of Melbourne it is not always easy for a stranger to find work, however able and willing he may be to do it. Ben replied in person to several advertisements, but without success. In most cases he was objected to because he could not give references as to character. He was growing more dispirited every day, and the kindness and sympathy of Mrs. Blake and her daughter were powerless to lift him above his present perplexities. His money was gradually diminishing, and he saw no prospect of earning enough to help his friend out of trouble—to induce a merciful turn of the gaol key.

One morning Ben was earlier than usual at the news-agent's shop, where he always went to look over the newspapers. He had glanced down the list headed

"servants wanted," and had taken the address of two persons who wanted "a sober young man," when his eye caught sight of an advertisement as follows:—"Henry Gordon Marshall. You are most affectionately entreated to return to your home without delay. A death has taken place in the family. No obstacles now exist. A cordial welcome awaits you. A liberal reward will be paid to any person, furnishing information of the above-named gentleman to Mr. Blackstone, solicitor, Temple Court, Melbourne."

"Henry Gordon Marshall!" ejaculated Ben. "It strikes me that's the name written in poor Dumby's Bible. I am almost certain of it, but I can soon see." He forthwith hastened back to his lodgings, took the Bible from his box, and sure enough there was written on the fly-leaf, "Henry Gordon Marshall. From his mother, Emily Marshall, Newby Hall."

The effect on Ben's spirits was almost marvellous; he fancied he had ready money within his grasp for the information he could give, and he would be able to engage counsel learned and clever enough to get Frank out of his difficulty. His countenance was so much brighter than usual when he sat down to breakfast, that Mrs. Blake said she hoped he had heard of a situation that would suit him.

"No, Mrs. Blake, I have not been so fortunate in that way, but I have something else in view, which I cannot explain to you now; perhaps when I come home to dinner I may be able to tell you some cheering news. I feel more hopeful at present than I have felt for many days past. If I can get poor Frank out of gaol I shall be happy."

Soon after ten o'clock Ben entered the outer office of Mr. Blackstone, and asked to see the head of the house.

"What is the nature of your business?" inquired a gentleman, who Ben supposed was the managing clerk.

"I wish to see Mr. Blackstone on a private matter, sir."

"Then please to step into the ante-room and wait till he is disengaged."

Ben walked into a sort of lobby, where there were two other persons waiting their turn to enter the room, with an inscription on the door, "Mr. Blackstone's office." Ben took a seat and waited until those persons had gone into the room, and in the meantime another client came in—a bustling, important-looking personage—who, when the door again opened, pressed his way into the office, without deigning to notice Ben's respectful remark; "It is my turn to go in, sir." Presently a fresh client stepped into the lobby—a smirky-faced old man.

"It is your turn to go in next, I suppose?" he said to Ben, with a look of fatherly interest.

"Yes, sir, it is; and it was my turn to go in before that last gentleman pushed past me. I told him so, but he took no notice of me."

"Ah! hustled in out of his turn, did he? It was not fair of him; at any rate he might have asked you to give way for him, as he was perhaps in a hurry. Civility costs nothing. I merely wish to say two words to Mr. Blackstone," added the smirky-faced client, edging into the recess of the doorway. I have only one sentence to say—not more, if you will allow me."

"Well, I think you ought to wait till I come out, sir."

"Don't be vexed; I'll not be half a minute."

In went the speaker to the lawyer's office, leaving Ben to reflect on the manners of some men of position, which he thought was not much more refined than that of common sailors in the fore-castle of a collier. In about

twenty minutes the wheedling old fellow came out again, and laying his hand on Ben's shoulder he said :

"I have exercised your patience too much, I fear ; but could not help it. My business took longer than I told you it would. You can go in now ; Mr. Blackstone is quite disengaged."

Ben walked into the office, and briefly informed a gentleman who was sitting behind a writing-table, that he had called to give some information respecting the late Mr. Henry Gordon Marshall.

"Oh indeed ! Take a seat, please. Pray what information can you give me of Mr. Marshall ? Do you know that gentleman ?"

"I did know him, sir. I sailed with him in the same vessel to New Zealand ; and I was with him when he died."

"Are you sure you are not mistaken ?"

"Quite sure, sir. I can prove every word I say to be true."

"Pray what is your name ?"

Ben told his name, and the lawyer wrote it down, and then asked him to tell all he knew about the gentleman advertised for. "Stay, not quite so fast, Mr. Bruce, I wish to write down your statement *verbatim*." Ben then slowly and carefully gave the lawyer a true account of all he knew of Mr. Marshall, *alias* Dumby, during his lifetime, and of his dying request to him to deliver the packet of manuscript to the person to whom it was directed. Ben reserved only the matter of the tin box, which he thought he had better not mention at present.

"Where is the packet which you say Mr. Marshall entrusted to your keeping for the time being ?" Mr. Blackstone asked, with an eagerness which for a moment contrasted with his previous cool, cautious bearing.

"I have it locked up in my box at my lodgings. It is safe enough, sir."

"You must bring it to me without delay. Perhaps it will be more convenient for you if I send my clerk with you to your lodgings. Please to tell me where you are living."

"Excuse me, Mr. Blackstone, but I solemnly promised the late Mr. Marshall that I would not deliver the packet into any other hands than the person whose name is written on its cover, and I would not break my word for any consideration. A promise made to a dying man ought to be sacredly kept."

"Oh, that is your view, is it? Just so—em—er—then will you tell me the name of the person you are going to give the parcel to?"

"I cannot think of the name at present," said Ben after a minute's reflection, "but I will bring you the name and address if you wish."

"Yes—by all means. Was there any witness of Mr. Marshall's death, besides yourself? Do you know where to find any of the crew of the vessel that you sailed in—the *Wolf*, I think you said it was?"

"Yes, sir; my shipmate, Frank Shorter, sewed Mr. Marshall up in his hammock, and helped to lift him on deck and launch him overboard."

"Oh, I am glad you have a witness to that fact. Where is he to be found?"

"He is now in Melbourne gaol, I am sorry to say, sir."

"Oh, dear! in gaol, is he? Then he is not a very reputable witness, I fear."

"Yes, he is, sir, asking your pardon. You may believe what he says as much as you seem to believe in me. He is as honest a man as I ever met with."

"Will you tell me what crime your honest friend was imprisoned for? It possibly may be something that is not of a very flagrant nature. I should like to know."

Ben then gave a faithful account of Frank's assault on Mr. Leary, and expressed his earnest wish to procure counsel for the defence of his friend, who was quite innocent of the robbery with which he was charged, as two respectable ladies could testify. Mr. Blackstone sat and listened with a grave face. He then cross-questioned Ben at some length; but finding that he could not get any further information from him respecting the late Mr. Marshall, he took down Frank's name in full, also Ben's name and address, and bade him call at the office the next day at noon.

Ben strolled homeward in a meditative mood, and less hopeful than when he set out a few hours before. He had had no previous experience with law or lawyers, and in his conscious innocence he wondered that Mr. Blackstone could not believe a plain straightforward statement of facts, which was clear as large print. He did not reflect that he was a stranger to the lawyer, and that it was only reasonable and prudent for a professional man to receive his statements cautiously, and to be on his guard against imposition. Ben had too sanguinely hoped that upon his giving the information which the advertiser asked for, he would have received the liberal reward promised, and which he hoped would have been enough to pay a learned counsel for Frank's defence, and perhaps leave a trifle over for current expenses. He was sorely disappointed. In his dejection he again lamented that he had ever set a foot on board the *Wolf*, from which ill-considered act had resulted such a succession of mishaps, including broken bones. Then his thoughts flew back to the memorable

Friday when he ran away from his grandmother's home to go to sea, and he dated his run of ill-luck from that very day and to that act of filial dishonour. Then with softened feelings he recalled the peaceful days he spent in the pretty village on the Hunter River—the most enjoyable period of his life, and he wished he had stopped there and hired as a labourer in one of the vineyards, or as second mate in the ferry punt. He would then have escaped the trouble and disgrace he had since suffered, and his kind messmate would now be a free man, instead of lying in gaol, in dreadful uncertainty whether or not he would be hanged or imprisoned for life, for attempted murder. Many older and wiser men than Ben have wasted time and worried their hearts, by lamenting over irremediable acts, or in dreading troublesome contingencies which fear and fretting could not possibly avert. Mrs. Blake noticed a change in Ben's manner when he went home to dinner, but she considerably abstained from asking him any questions, and he did not volunteer any information.

Punctual to the appointed time, Ben entered the office next day, and bowed respectfully to Mr. Blackstone. "Good-morning to you, Mr. Bruce. I am busy, but please to take a seat," said the lawyer, who was really as anxious as Ben was for the interview. "Let me see, it is on the late Mr. Marshall's affairs that you have called—just so. Oh, let me tell you first of all that I have seen your friend in Melbourne gaol, and he has told me the particulars of his case, which I have made some notes of, as I may be able to help him at the approaching trial. But I find he is charged with aggravated assault and robbery: very serious charges indeed—exceedingly so."

"Yes, sir, but as I told you before, he is innocent of

the robbery as I am ; and as for the assault, it was perfectly justifiable, as you would say if you knew all about it. It is very kind of you to visit him, sir, and I am much obliged to you."

"By the way, Shorter said something to me about a box as well as a parcel, that the late Mr. Marshall entrusted to your care."

"His box, or sea-chest, was landed at Wellington, sir, by order of the captain of the *Wolf*. I saw it put into the police boat."

"I do not mean his sea-chest, Mr. Bruce, though we must of course see after that, and I will make a note of it. Your friend in the gaol told me that you have a small tin box in your possession, which belonged to the deceased gentleman."

"That is a mistake, sir. I have not seen the box."

"From the discrepancy between your statement and that of your associate, it is very reasonable that I should begin to suspect you both," said Mr. Blackstone, with a searching look at Ben's face, which certainly did not index a deceitful nature, as the lawyer was physiognomist enough to know.

"I will tell you honestly and plainly all I can tell you in this matter, sir ; and if you suspect me of deceit I cannot help it. The late Mr. Marshall told me where I should find a small tin box, but he did not even hint to me what it contained. On the evening that my friend got into trouble, we were going out to search for the box in the spot where I was directed to look for it."

"Oh, I see ; you have not actually got the said box in your possession, but you know where it is. Is that what I am to understand ?"

"I know somewhere about the spot that Mr. Marshall

said the box is buried, but I have not yet dug for it. I have not had a chance to do so."

"Have you any objection to tell me where that spot is?"

"I dare not tell you, sir."

"That is strange! you '*dare not* tell'! Pray explain why. It strikes me you will have to tell all about it, Mr. Bruce."

"This is all the explanation I can give you, sir. Mr. Marshall, with his dying breath, made me solemnly vow that I would deliver the parcel and the tin box into the hands of a certain gentleman in England; and he hinted that his ghost would visit me if I broke faith. No persuasion or threats will make me run the risk of being troubled in that way. The safest and honestest plan is to keep to my word; and that I mean to do."

"You are afraid of a ghost, and that is why you will not tell all you know in this matter? Is that it?" asked the lawyer, and he smiled incredulously. "One would not fancy from the look of you that you are so superstitious."

"I wish to be honest and truthful, sir," replied Ben with respectful firmness. "I have told you all that I actually know at present. I am not sure that I can find the tin box, but if I do find it I will tell you that I have done so, though I cannot agree to give it up to you. I made a solemn pledge to a dying man, and I own that I am afraid to break that pledge. If that is being superstitious, I am not ashamed of it."

Mr. Blackstone sat for a few minutes rubbing his chin and seemingly in perplexing cogitation. Presently he said, "If I procure responsible bail for this man, Frank what's-his-name, in gaol, will you deposit with me the said tin box and the parcel of manuscripts, as a guaran-

tee of good faith, upon my giving you an assurance that they shall not be opened or tampered with in any way?"

"I dare not do that, sir. I have vowed that I will not give the things up to any one save the person to whom they are directed, and I will faithfully keep my vow, if I live. I would gladly do anything in my power to get my friend out of gaol, for I can hardly fulfil what I have undertaken to do without his help; but if I cannot get him bailed out by any other means than by breaking my oath, he must stay where he is and take his chance. He would rather stay there, I am sure, than that I should get him out by dishonourable means. I have no fear for him if he gets fair play; and if I can get counsel for his defence I will do it. I should perhaps be working to earn money with that object, just now, if I had not seen your advertisement and called upon you. I cannot afford to waste my time, sir."

The decisive tone in which Ben spoke influenced Mr. Blackstone's feelings—or apparently so, for he looked more sympathising than before. He said, in a softer mood, that it would indeed be hard for an innocent man to remain in gaol for want of a friend to bail him out; and after a little more consideration, he promised, if Ben would pledge his word of honour that Frank would not abscond before his trial, that he, Mr. Blackstone, would personally be bail for him; and not only so, but he would find a clever barrister to conduct his defence. His own conviction was that Shorter was an honest man, though perhaps impetuous or hot-tempered.

"If you had seen the provocation Shorter received, you would not wonder at his warmth of temper," said Ben. "To see two helpless women cruelly insulted by

a brutal fellow, was more than his English blood could tamely bear. If Frank had not punished him I certainly would have done it."

"The prosecutor is well known in the city, Mr. Bruce, and that fact will be much in favour of your friend. You may depend I will do all in my power for him; and I shall be glad also to be of any further service to you while you are in Melbourne. Perhaps you will like to step with me. I will see if I can get Mr. Shorter liberated this afternoon."

Ben gladly accompanied Mr. Blackstone in a cab to some law-court, where certain legal forms were gone through, and soon afterwards Frank was released from prison, and returned home with Ben to their lodgings, where they received a real motherly welcome from Mrs. Blake, and a modest sisterly smile of gladness from her amiable daughter, which was as enlivening to Ben's heart as sunshine is to a caged bird.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Her modest looks the cottage might adorn ;
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn.”

—*Goldsmith.*

IT is not often that two sailors on their first landing in a strange city meet with such a comfortable home as Ben and Frank were recommended to by the good captain of the barque in which they voyaged from Newcastle. And I would here remark that if other ship-masters were to take the pains to recommend suitable lodgings to the sailors who are leaving their ships, there would be less scope for the nefarious practices of crimps—those artful characters that are to be found in every port in the civilized world. For reasons which will subsequently appear, it is necessary for me to give some particulars of the earlier history of Mrs. Blake and her amiable daughter, which may help the reader to form a fair estimate of their social and moral qualities.

Mrs. Blake arrived in Victoria about ten years before Ben first saw her, with her late husband and their only child, Annie, who was then about seven years of age. Mr. Blake was a carpenter and builder, and he had at one time a good jobbing connection in the village of Hopley, where he was born, and which was about the centre of the hop cultivation in Sussex, England. But glowing accounts of the rich gold-diggings in Australia reached his village, and for awhile threatened to de-

populate it. A man who went from Hopley to Victoria two years before had dug up a moderate size nugget of gold at Bendigo, and his letter to his father, describing the happy, independent life of a gold-digger, and the high wages that everybody was then earning in the colony, was published in the *Hopley Gazette*, and produced quite a rage for emigration. Several families started for Melbourne by the first ship, and after awhile Mr. Blake was tempted to break up his home and prepare to try his future in the land of gold. His aged father was sorely averse to his going abroad, and strove to dissuade him from the step.

"Alick, my son!" said the old man, with a quavering voice, when his opinion was asked about the contemplated movement, "Alick, my son! while you are doing well in your native place, keep to your post. Let others go and search for gold-dust who have not steady work to do at home, but do you stay here and be content to pick up silver coin slowly but surely. That's my advice to you, Alick, and I fear you will go wrong if you slight it."

The old man did not cease to try all the power of his rustic logic to persuade his son that his post of duty was in his native village, where he had an increasing business which enabled him to keep a comfortable home over his head and pay for the education of his children, and also to put by a few pounds every year for the probable requirements of old age; moreover, where he had an office of honour and usefulness as leader of the choir in the parish church. But Alick had read so many bedazzling accounts of sudden fortunes being made at the goldfields, that his mind could no longer bend to the slow work of patching outhouse roofs, and other little odd jobs which came within his routine

as the master carpenter and joiner of the village. He determined to emigrate. So he sold the most bulky of his household effects, and packed up the rest as personal baggage. He bade adieu to the village choir, in which he had taken such pleasure and pride for many years ; he took a sorrowing farewell of his father and other relatives, and soon afterwards sailed from London in a clipper ship bound for Melbourne direct.

When Alick stood beside his grief-stricken wife on the deck of the ship, far at sea, and saw the remains of his only son, a promising lad of twelve years old, committed to the deep, his old father's earnest entreaties came to his mind, and he wished he had not left home. And when the ship struck upon the rocks on King's Island in Bass Straits, and he saw all his worldly effects scattered to the waves, and his wife and child in danger of being whirled to death in those merciless breakers, he again recalled his father's words, and mentally owned that he had missed his way and run out of the path of duty, which is always the path of safety. He was sorry he had slighted parental counsel. Many others have unwisely given up their comfortable homes and steady employment, and emigrated to Australia or elsewhere, and have had sorrowful reason to regret that they gave up a certainty for an uncertainty. Some of them have never found a comfortable home again.

Mr. Blake landed in Melbourne with his wife and daughter, but without any luggage, and thankful were they all that their lives were spared. He had a few sovereigns, which he had barely time to take from his chest before the ship filled with water. He was there-with enabled to furnish two rooms and buy necessary clothing for his family and a few tools for himself. He had a strong, healthy body, and a willing mind, so he

soon found work at his trade. His wife also got work at shirt-making from a warehouse in Flinders Street, and by careful management they were able to save money, for wages were high and work was plentiful. After a while they bought a plot of ground at North Melbourne, and erected a small wooden house on it. It was certainly a rough dwelling compared with their late home in England, but they were contented in it, and hoped by degrees to add to its comfort and conveniences.

The disastrous fire which destroyed so many small houses at North Melbourne a few years ago may perhaps be remembered by some of my readers. When that mishap occurred, Alick was roofing an iron shed in Elizabeth Street—a rather warm job for a bright summer day. He saw smoke arising from part of North Melbourne, a safe distance, he thought, from his own home, and he remarked to a fellow-workman beside him, "There is some poor fellow being burnt out of house and home. Half an hour afterwards he saw by the rapid spread of the flames that several buildings were on fire, and his own house was in danger, so he dropped his tools and away he hastened to the scene of disaster; but he arrived there only in time to see his little cottage blaze away into ashes, while he stood by powerless to save even a barrowful of wood for fuel for the morrow. It was a total loss.

"If you had taken the wise precaution to insure your cottage, Alick, you might now have money in hand to rebuild it," said Mr. Wood, Alick's master, on the day after the fire."

"I meant to insure it after it was finished, sir."

"Yes, that is the way with a good many folks in the world, Alick. They mean to do certain things that are

of great importance to them, but they put off the actual doing till it is too late. Insurance companies will now issue policies on small wooden houses at a moderate rate, and it is foolish for any one to neglect to insure his house against a fire risk ; for careful as he may be himself, he cannot be sure that his neighbours are not careless. However, I do not wish to add to your distress by saying too much about a mistake which cannot now be avoided ; you are sorry for it, I can see. A quaker gentleman once said to an uninsured neighbour, who was telling of his loss through the burning of part of his premises, 'It serves thee right, friend Hooper. Thou shouldest have insured.' I won't say that it serves you right, Alick, but I hope that you will guard against a similar mishap in future. You may pick out from the old lumber heap any stuff that will be useful to you in rebuilding your house, and you may have the remainder of the week to yourself, without a deduction of wages."

Alick thanked his master for his kind consideration, and he was going to the lumber yard to look out some timber, when Mr. Wood called him back and said in a pleasant tone, "I say, Alick, have you insured your life ?"

"No, sir," replied Alick, somewhat abashed, for he had heard his master read a clever lecture on "Life Assurance," at the Mechanics' Institute a few weeks before. "I have not insured my life yet, sir ; but I mean to do it as soon as I can afford to pay the premium."

"It will not cost you much money as you are a sound, healthy man, Alick, and I advise you to lose no time in insuring for a reasonable sum, for the sake of those who are near and dear to you. You little thought

yesterday morning that you would be burnt out of your home before night, and life is as precarious as property. Poor Adams, you know, was taken off without five minutes' warning, and his wife and family are now dependent upon charity. When he got into his cart on Monday morning, he did not think that he would be picked up and carried home with a broken back in less than an hour afterwards. A defective buckle in his horse's bridle cost Adams his life; and I have known a nail-head to cause a man to fall from a building and cripple himself. Death is always lurking about us, and the wisest of us cannot ward him off. We ought to provide for those who are dependent on us as far as we are able to do it."

Alick could not but be influenced by his master's judicious remarks, and a few weeks afterwards he insured his life in one of the Melbourne offices for £250. It cost him only a few shillings a week, and he used to say to his shopmates that it was worth twice the money to him for the comfort it afforded him to know that if he died suddenly his dear wife and child would be provided for. Four years afterwards Alick had quite recovered his loss by the fire, for he was a steady man, and very careful with his money. He rebuilt his cottage; but soon afterwards he was offered a substantial brick one at Carlton on easy terms, so he sold his wooden cottage and gave the money in part payment for the brick one. He was sanguine of being able to pay off the balance in less than two years, by working overtime and being extra saving; but one day death suddenly stopped all his plans, and hurried him to his "last home." He was working at a building in Lonsdale Street, and was helping to fix a heavy beam into the middle floor, when the tackling gave way, the beam

fell on him, and he was crushed to death on the spot, and one of his fellow-workmen also.

I will not try to depict the grief of his widow and daughter when Alick's lifeless body was carried home to them. Sorrow such as theirs cannot be adequately described, and it is, perhaps, better not to meddle with it. It was a severe trial for them; but the belief that he was always prepared for death was a solace to their afflicted hearts which no other consideration could have yielded. After a few months Mrs. Blake received from the Assurance Office the amount for which her late husband was insured. Therewith she paid off the mortgage on her cottage, and had a little money to spare. Her daughter got a situation in a milliner's shop in Collins Street, and with their joint earnings they managed to make a comfortable livelihood.

A visitor to Victoria cannot fail to be struck with the tasteful style of the cottage architecture in most of the suburbs of Melbourne. A mere glance at the neatly kept flower garden in front of Mrs. Blake's ornate little cottage would create a favourable impression of the tenant; but on stepping into her cosy front parlour any person of quiet homely tastes would be apt to say in the words of an old song, "If there's peace to be found in the world, a heart that is humble might hope for it here." Everything betokened order, cleanliness, and comfort, which to some tastes are much more inviting than fashionable elegance. Without rudely presuming to give an inventory of the widow's goods and chattels, I may remark that there were many evidences of feminine taste to be seen on the centre table, and on a cedar stand beside an old arm-chair was a large family Bible, which plainly showed by its worn cover that it was not a mere ornament in the room. In a rosewood frame, made by

the late Mr. Blake himself, was a cleverly executed crayon of a wrecked vessel, and beneath it was written : "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters ; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep." And in another frame of corresponding make on the opposite side of the room, was a testimonial engrossed on parchment, expressive of the lasting esteem and affection which the Hopley Church choristers entertained for their respected leader, Mr. Alexander Blake. A compliment was also paid to his worthy wife.

In person, Mrs. Blake was as neat and tidy as her house would lead any visitor to suppose her to be, before they saw her. She was approaching to fifty years of age, and her hair was silvery gray. Her placid face indicated something more than an even temper and sound health. She had a settled peace which religion always yields ; and though it did not exempt her from ordinary troubles, it enabled her to bear them without fretfulness. Annie Blake was seventeen years of age. Her face was not handsome, but there was more attraction in it than there often is in classically formed faces—there was a speaking animation and a sweet expression, which indicated a sympathising nature and a cheerful temper. Her figure was graceful, and her modest style of dress showed that simplicity or artlessness was one of her leading characteristics. She had a voice clear as a bell bird, and it was distinguishable from all the other voices in the church choir. Had it been highly cultivated it might have yielded her better remuneration than she received at Madame Fleur's millinery shop. That suggestion was once made to her by a professional lady, but her mother expressed such a decided objection to it that Annie was thereafter silent on the subject. "If you

get less pay as a milliner, my girl," said her anxious mother, "both you and I will have less anxiety ; and if you never acquire fame or popularity you will be more secure from the stings of envy. Rely on it, you are in your proper sphere at present, my dear ; and if you continue to follow the trustful example of your late dear father, your way will be made plain through life."

The foregoing is a brief description of the inmates of the home into which Ben and Frank were fortunate enough to find lodgings. Mrs. Blake always made it a study to do all she could for the comfort of her boarders, but she felt a more than usual interest in Frank and Ben, on account of the timely service they had rendered her and the trouble they had incurred thereby.

Very soon after the joyful return of her lodgers, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, Mrs. Blake and her daughter busied themselves in preparing an extra substantial tea ; and when they all sat down to the table together they were not a little amused at Frank's graphic account of his experience in prison, and his description of the characters he had met with there, some of whom he said had been first-rate gentlemen, and had perhaps never handled an iron spoon, or slept without sheets in their beds, till they got into Melbourne gaol.

"Oh, I cannot tell you how grieved I have been, Mr. Shorter, that you should have got into such trouble through your kindness to me and my girl," said Mrs. Blake, with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

"Never mind, ma'am," replied Frank kindly. "Pray don't grieve any more about it. I did my duty, and it is my belief that our lawyer will show the jury that it was nothing more than my duty, and I shall get off with

flying colours. If not, law is not justice, and women's rights are not properly respected in this country; and I shall say as much as that to the jury if they convict me."

After tea was over, Ben and Frank retired to their bedroom to put on their overcoats, prior to going out to search for the tin box in Fitzroy Gardens. As Frank was getting something out of his box he remarked, "I believe that Mrs. Blake is the kindest old lady I have met with since I left my mother's home. Just look here, Ben; if she hasn't been overhauling all my linen while I was in gaol! Everything washed and ironed, and aired too, I'll be bound! Well, well! that is good of her. There isn't a button or a button-hole but is all staunch and ready for sea; and all my old stockings darned up as sound as new ones. Thank'ee, old lady, I am much obliged to you; I'll buy you a new thimble before I leave the country, and something else, too, that shall cost more than half a peck of brass thimbles."

"It was very thoughtful of her, Frank. I am sure we are lucky fellows to get into such comfortable quarters, and be so well looked after."

"Yes—very lucky indeed, especially myself," responded Frank, with a comical look. "Never mind, mate; we *are* lucky—you are right; and I would run the risk of being kept in prison for life to save any honest woman from the insults of that rich rascal, Leary, or any other fellow of his bad sort. Ha, ha! wasn't he a real beauty in court, with his patched-up nose and his starboard eye looking like a grummet-hole in a tarpaulin! I could hardly help laughing before all the justices and lawyers."

"He need not have troubled himself to swear to the assault, his face was evidence enough. Now then, Frank, if you are ready, let us be off. Dumby's chart of the

gardens is in my pocket. I have been studying it carefully, and I think I can pitch on the exact spot without any trouble."

"I'm all ready, shipmate ; but don't you think we had better buy a lantern as we go along? I think a light always helps a fellow's pluck."

"We surely don't want a lantern when we have a full moon overhead. We should, perhaps, be mistaken for house-breakers."

"Ay, I forgot that, Ben. Well, go ahead, and I'll keep close alongside of you, whatever we meet with of a mortal kind, and you must promise not to run ahead of me if we fall in with Dumby's ghost, because you know more of him than I do."

They told Mrs. Blake that they would be back in an hour or two, and then left the house.

CHAPTER XII.

“By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.”

—*Shakespeare.*

“I SAY, Frank, why did you tell the lawyer anything about this precious tin box that we are going to dig for?” asked Ben, as he and his companion were walking towards the Fitzroy Gardens together.

“I have been expecting you to ask me that question, Ben. I daresay you think I am a soft-headed old fellow, and not fit to be trusted in this uncommon business of ours. The plain fact is, Mr. Blackstone got the weather-gage of me in a puff—as yachtsmen say; but I’ll take care he doesn’t do it again, cunning as he is. He asked me no end of simple questions about poor Dumby, and I answered them straightforward enough, for it is no good trying to hide the truth—it will come out somehow or other; and of course I did not suspect any manœuvring on his part. After he had cross-questioned me till I began to get tired of it, I thought I would check him a bit; so I said, civilly enough, but with sailor-like spirit, ‘I launched my shipmate Dumby’s corpse off the *Wolf’s* gangway, sir, and that is the last I saw of him. I cannot tell you any more about the poor fellow if you bother me for a month.’

“‘I don’t suppose you saw any more of the unfortunate man after you had sunk him to the bottom of the sea,’

said the lawyer, 'but what became of his effects? That is what I want you to tell me, Mr. Shorter; and I wish you to speak out like an honest man who is not easily bothered. Depend on it I shall get at the truth, whether you choose to tell it or not.'

"'I told you before, sir, that his sea-chest was landed at Wellington in the pilot boat,' I replied.

"'And the other effects, of which your friend, Mr. Bruce, told me, what has become of them?' said he, looking at me very suspiciously.

"'Oh, the tin box—leastways the paper parcel I mean,' said I, checking myself, or trying to do it: and that was how the secret came out, you see, Ben—innocently enough on my part; but the lawyer caught at the box, like a barracuda biting at a bare hook. He asked me again and again about it, but I stuck to it that I had never seen it at all."

"That was true enough, Frank."

"Of course it was, mate. There would be no luck in my sticking to a lie. Now without wishing to boast too much, I wouldn't mind backing myself against any full grown fellow, either seaman or landsman, with short-sword, cutlass, or single-stick, but I am not good at tongue fencing with a learned lawyer. Still, though I can't argue a point cleverly, I can stick hard and fast to a simple fact. Mr. Blackstone tried, in his lawyer-like way, to scare me into saying what would not be true, until at last I got rather cross, and said that if I was going to be hanged at the yard-arm directly I could not tell him where the box was, nor what was inside of it, and then he soon walked off; but I was vexed with myself, for I knew I had let him know more than you had told him about this concern that we are now going after—this mysterious tin box, good luck to it."

"Well, it can't be helped, Frank. We have neither of us told a lie about it, for we have not seen the box yet ; but we soon shall see it, I suppose, and I hope it is not too heavy for us to carry away."

"I hope there isn't any wicked roguery in it, Ben, and then I don't care about the weight of it. But a small tin box can't be much of a load for two sailors to carry, even if it should be full of gold-dust, or quicksilver, or any other heavy stuff. Yonder goes a car, Ben, so we may as well ride and save our sea-boots. Car ahoy!" The car stopped, and they got into it and drove off.

Soon afterwards they entered the Fitzroy Gardens ; and with the aid of their chart they found the elm-tree near to which the box was buried. "This is the tree, sure enough, and we have found it without much trouble. Hand me your rule, Frank : we must measure four feet due north. Let me see, yonder is the Southern Cross ; so, allowing for variation, I think this is about the spot," said Ben, after he had carefully measured four feet in a northerly direction. "Out with your marlinespike and chip up the ground—it's only a foot deep, I believe."

"Do you see anything?" Frank asked, while casting a furtive glance around him before he went on his knees.

"No, there is not anything in sight. What are you scared at, Frank?"

"I don't want to see a ghost, that's all. I am not scared at anything else. Keep a look-out, Ben, while I go at it." Frank then took his marlinespike from his pocket and began to chip up the ground, which was rather hard owing to the continued dry weather. Presently his tool grated upon some metal substance. "Hullo ! here it is and no mistake, Ben ! If it should be full of gold-dust, I vote that we stick to it. What do you say, shipmate?"

"Dig away, dig away, Frank. Let us have it out. I am glad we have found it so easily. Poor Dumby was right in his measurement."

In another minute Frank held in his hand an oblong box, about nine inches in length and four inches in depth and breadth. "Pooh! it's only a tin of herrings after all," he said, in a contemptuous tone. "Anyway it isn't heavy enough for gold or any other handy metal."

"Put it under your coat, and we will see more about it when we get home," replied Ben, as he scraped the earth back into the hole with his foot. We have not had much trouble in finding it, and I hope we shall find the owner of it as easily. Is it heavy, Frank?"

"No, it is almost as light as a box of chicken's bladders. Feel it, Ben, and carry it, too, if you like. I shouldn't wonder if you suspect me of planning to run away with it. I am downright ashamed of myself for talking about sticking to it just now. I feel like a wicked old thief. When my marlinespike first touched the box under ground, the swindling notion came into my head all of a sudden, and my tongue let it out. That was the devil's advice no doubt, and it shows how close he always is to my elbow, and the need for me to be continually on the watch. I hope you will look over that mistake of mine, Ben."

"All right, Frank: I shall soon forget that you said it."

"Thank'ee, mate. But in all honesty this may turn out a lucky job for us. Dumby told you that it might make your fortune, didn't he?"

"He said something to that effect, Frank, and I believe him, too. I have since thought he was only raving about this box, and that the parcel itself might be some nonsense or other—poetry, perhaps, which he

only would set any value upon; but now I begin to think there is business of great importance connected with the whole affair. Perhaps Dumby was a runaway son of some great man."

"Likely enough, Ben. There are lots of such comical characters in this part of the world, worse luck. I once met with the roystering heir to a Scotch baronetcy, at Monganui, New Zealand, and he was pulling a whale-boat for a bare livelihood; and there were other young bloods in the same place, who were getting their living in a less honest way. Now suppose we should make a couple of hundred pounds a piece out of this business! That isn't too much to expect; do you think it is, mate?"

"It is more than I expect to get, Frank; but supposing we should be so fortunate, what would you propose to do with the money?"

"I was thinking that we might return to Sydney and go partners in a coasting vessel. There was a big lump of a schooner sold for £400, while we were lying at the Grafton Wharf. She would have suited us well for the coal trade, say between Sydney and Wollongong."

"But I am not a bred sailor, you know, Frank. I would prefer to start in some money-making business on shore."

"The coal and wood trade would do us first-rate, Ben. I have known several sailors to go into that line and make money like winking. There is not so much art in it as there is in some other trades or professions. I could saw up billet wood like a donkey-engine."

"But we might have a real steam-engine to saw it up, Frank; and I could drive that. Portable engines are to be picked up very cheap."

"A capital notion of yours, Ben; and we might get a small vessel, too, if our trade prospered. I could sail

the vessel, and you could stay on shore and sell the coal and wood that I brought to you. My stars! I can see how we may drive a roaring business in a snug and quiet way."

"Ha, ha! and perhaps drive our carriages soon, eh, Frank?"

"I don't want a carriage, mate; but that is not impossible either, for old Tom Grimes, the coal merchant, started a carriage. Fortunes have been made out of coal, smutty as it is. Anyway, we must drive our coal cart a long while before we think of riding in our carriage. After awhile you would, perhaps, be getting married, Ben, and then I could come and sling my hammock on shore when our vessel was in port. Wouldn't that be nice and comfortable?"

"My chance of getting married is a long way off," said Ben with a sigh. "No doubt it would be comfortable, but there is no such luck for me."

"You needn't be so downhearted over it, Ben. I wish I had as good a prospect as you have in that way. I was noticing that nice little damsel at our lodgings at tea-time; when she asked you if your tea was to your taste, she looked as sweet as sugar-candy at you, and to tell you the truth, I fancied you had been saying soft things to her while I was away in prison."

Ben pleasantly rebutted the charge, and then retorted on his merry companion by hinting that the widow had some special object in view in looking after his buttons so carefully. Whereupon Frank laughed, and said that he was doomed through life to "paddle his own canoe." That sanguine forecasting of the future, or castle-building, as it is sometimes called, occupied them agreeably until they reached their lodgings. Frank remarked, as he unfastened the front gate, that they had not seen

anything in the shape of a ghost, though he certainly expected to see one when he was digging up the box. Just at that moment two policemen, who had been watching Ben and Frank, walked over from the opposite side of the street and collared them both. They were startled at their unexpected arrest, but offered no resistance.

Great was the consternation of Mrs. Blake, on opening her door at the sound of voices outside, to see two policemen with her lodgers, and she very naturally had misgivings as to their character, although they were recommended to her by her good friend Captain Briggs, of the barque *Mary*.

"Tell us why you are making prisoners of us, mister," said Frank to the police sergeant, as soon as he had entered the house.

"I arrest you both on suspicion of having stolen property in your possession. Show me what you have concealed under your monkey jacket."

"I don't know what it is," replied Frank, and at the same time he handed out the box from beneath his coat tails.

"I must look inside your boxes," said the sergeant, who forthwith entered their bedroom and turned out the contents of Frank's chest, without finding anything of a suspicious nature. He then opened Ben's chest, and turned its contents on to the floor. Several articles of clothing he tossed back into the box; Dumby's Bible he also threw back without opening it. He then took up the parcel of manuscript which Dumby had roughly tied up just prior to his death, and was about to open it when Ben said, excitedly, "I warn you not to open that parcel."

"What is inside it? anything that will explode? It

does not look very dangerous, though it's precious musty," said the policeman, as he smelt the parcel all over.

"I don't know what is in it ; but it was put into my hands by a dying man, and he intimated most solemnly that his ghost would visit anybody who dared to untie that string except the person to whom it is addressed. I would be shot dead rather than open it."

"Oh, it is addressed to some one, is it ? I did not see the writing before. Well, I don't want to open the parcel, but I must take it away with me ; the ghost will not object to that, I suppose, and if he does I can't help it. Now then, come on ; it is my duty to take you both to the lock-up, and I hope you will walk along quietly."

"I trust they have not done anything to affect the character of my house, policeman ?" said Mrs. Blake, entering the room and looking very disconcerted. I fully believed they were decent, respectable men when I took them in, and so did Captain Briggs, I am sure, or he would not have sent them to my house as boarders."

"Don't distress yourself, Mrs. Blake," said Frank, kindly ; "neither I nor my friend have done anything that we are ashamed of. It is no use telling our story to these policemen, for they dare not let us go even if they had a mind to. We must go with them, and we will go quietly ; but if the law only gives us fair-play, you may depend on it we shall be back again to-morrow, and then you shall hear all about it. Good-night, ma'am. Ben also said good-night, and they were marched off between the two policemen, but without being handcuffed.

After her lodgers were taken away, poor Mrs. Blake

was in a state of excitement painful for her daughter to witness, and her fears helped her to surmise all sorts of disagreeable consequences from her taking two strangers into her home without more careful consideration and inquiry into their characters. Annie said all she could to console her mother, but it was some time before her soothing words had any perceptible effect. The present trouble was quite a new experience to the honest old widow.

"We don't know who is who now-a-days, my girl. I suppose it is because the goldfields have not been so productive of late that there are more wicked rogues in Melbourne than there used to be years ago, when your poor father was alive. I don't know what is to become of us if this affair gets into the newspapers again and our character is ruined. It distresses me to think of it."

"Pray do not trouble yourself so much, mother dear!" urged Annie. "I can hardly believe that these men are dishonest, especially Mr. Bruce; but even if it should be proved that they are bad fellows, surely no one who knows us will believe that we knew them to be bad, when we took them in as boarders."

"My house has always been noted for its orderly and respectable character. Such scenes as have occurred here during the last fortnight have never before been witnessed under my roof since I first came to the colony, nor, indeed, when I had a roof of my own elsewhere. But I don't know what to do to alter things."

"All's for the best. Don't you remember you have said that, or something like it, to me, mother, when I have been perplexed with some of my little fancied troubles at the shop, but which have afterwards turned out to be not troubles at all, but quite the contrary?"

And you have often told me that it was better to think of something comforting than to worry about things that I could not mend."

"Yes, that's true, my love. It seems as if I know how to give advice better than than to use it myself. It may be foolish to worry, but it seems as if I can't help it just now. We certainly have had nothing to do with those men's wicked acts if they have been guilty of any, and I hope nobody will suspect us. If they should do so, we know that we are innocent—that's a comfort. Heigho!" sighed the widow again, after a few minutes' solemn cogitation. "Perhaps it is all for the best, as you say, Annie. Those men might have plotted against us in some dreadful way, and it's a mercy they are taken to the lock-up before they could mature their plans. Bruce may be a villain in his heart, though he does seem so modest in his manner to us."

"Oh, mother dear, I really think you are misjudging the poor men."

"Possibly so, Annie. I hope I may be mistaken. But you must admit that I have had more experience of life than you have. I don't think I shall alter my opinion to-night, so we had better prepare for bed. My head is aching badly, and I fear I shall not sleep much."

CHAPTER XIII.

“Condemn the fault, and not the actor of it.”

—*Shakespeare.*

NEARLY twelve months before the arrival of Ben and Frank in Melbourne, Mr. Blackstone received a confidential communication from a solicitor in England, requesting him to cause a diligent search to be made for Mr. Henry Gordon Marshall, who had absconded from his home some time before, taking with him a large amount in cash, and bonds or coupons of still greater value. He had been traced to New York, and thence to California; but though there had been active agents in that country on the look-out for him for many months they failed to obtain a clue to his whereabouts, and it was conjectured that he had made his way to one of the Australian colonies. Mr. Blackstone was urged to spare no expense in the search for the fugitive, and if possible to recover the stolen property; but for family reasons it was desirable to prevent the fraudulent nature of his acts being made public.

Acting on the advice of his correspondent, which was accompanied with a guarantee for the payment of all fees and costs, Mr. Blackstone commissioned one of the clerks in his office to go in quest of the absconder. It was not deemed advisable to employ a police officer, for private reasons before hinted at; moreover, Mr. Blackstone preferred confining the manipulation of the whole

affair to his own office. The clerk who was despatched on the exciting errand was a brisk young man, of easy address and accommodating manners; he had no domestic ties to hold him back, and he accepted the post with a readiness which will be understood by any one who usually works at an office desk all the year round.

Mr. Sharp paid leisurely visits to most of the goldfields in Victoria; and the particulars of his tour would have made a thick volume, if he had been as much disposed to go into bookmaking as some tourists are. He visited many diggers' camps under various pretexts, but he did not meet with any person corresponding to the photographic likeness which he carried in his pocket-book. He had reason to believe, however, that a man somewhat like the absconder had been at Bendigo, and also at Kingower diggings; but the name of Henry Gordon Marshall was not known to any one that he met with. After several months of unsuccessful searching, Mr. Sharp returned to Melbourne, looking more like a sunburnt digger or bushman than a city clerk. He was preparing to start on another pleasant tour, to the New South Wales goldfields, when a second letter was received by Mr. Blackstone from the solicitor in England, informing him that owing to a death in the Marshall family, the absconder, Henry Gordon Marshall, became entitled to a large estate, which realized £6,000 a year from the royalty of its coal mines alone. It was necessary that he should return to England at once if living; but otherwise, that proofs of his decease should be sent home as soon as possible. Moreover, his return was earnestly desired by the surviving members of his family, who wished him to be assured that all past misdoings would be overlooked—an encouragement which is generally given to wealthy inheritors.

In consequence of that fresh communication, Mr. Blackstone advertised for the missing gentleman in all the leading newspapers of the Australian colonies. The advertisement had appeared for more than two months in the *Melbourne Argus* before it met the eye of Ben, under the circumstances I have stated. Mr. Sharp secretly wished that Ben had been blind. He was joyfully preparing to set out again for a free and easy jaunt to the New South Wales goldfields, and he was sorely disappointed when Ben first called at the office. But Mr. Blackstone was glad to see such a promising client, for he soon perceived the importance of the information which Ben was possessed of. His first glance at the young man's honest face assured him that he was not in danger of being imposed upon by any deeply laid trick. Ben's straightforward answers to the questions put to him, showed an entire absence of roguish cunning, and that he had an honest desire to fulfil the task he had undertaken, as soon as possible. Mr. Blackstone inferred that the parcel for which Ben had such a mysterious regard, contained the valuable documents which it was so desirable to regain possession of, and he was naturally anxious to get it—nay, he had mentally resolved that he *would* get it; but how to proceed about it in a pacific way, so as to avoid exposure, required much consideration and professional ingenuity. It was highly gratifying to know that Ben had an accomplice, or a living witness of the death of Mr. Marshall, within such easy means of access. Mr. Blackstone saw the advantage to be gained by an interview with the prisoner; so he decided to visit Frank before Ben could possibly communicate with him. He appointed noon the next day to see Ben again, and no sooner had he left the office, than the happy lawyer got

into a cab and drove full trot to the gaol. Ben, as he walked homeward cogitating on the stirring events of that morning, and on the personal benefit that might accrue therefrom, had not the least suspicion that Mr. Sharp was following him at a safe distance, in short, that he was being closely watched.

Mr. Blackstone was too keen a diplomatist to tell Frank at first the real object of his visit. He began by inquiring into the nature of the charge on which he was committed to gaol; and stated that he had been requested by a Mr. Bruce to procure counsel for the defence. After Frank had expressed his gratitude for the thoughtful kindness of his friend Ben, he told all about the affray with Mr. Leary, and was incidentally led on, by questions adroitly put to him, to state how and where he first became acquainted with Ben, and that the object they jointly had in coming to Melbourne was to manage a little business for a deceased shipmate, and then go to England to carry some things to the dead man's friends. That admission was enough for Mr. Blackstone to make many inquiries, without exciting the suspicions of the simple old sailor; and at length he accidentally alluded to the tin box, which they had not yet got possession of. But Frank soon perceived that he had told a little too much, and then he began to be very guarded in his answers, and to display something like a dogged obstinacy, when he suspected that he was "being pumped by the cunning lawyer."

After Mr. Blackstone's second interview with Ben, he felt convinced that the said tin box contained the missing documents, but he was sure it was no use to try any powers of persuasion to induce Ben to tell where the box was concealed. Nothing short of judicial measures would soften such obstinacy, and he was doubtful if

even the law itself could be applied to the case as it then stood. Mr. Sharp was more hopeful than his master, though he confessed that his own views differed from the learned authorities he had referred to in the office library. The case seemed to be surrounded with difficulties, as cases often are to legal gentlemen, when they seem to be as clear as daylight to non-professional investigators. The missing documents were stolen property, undoubtedly, and it was equally clear who was the thief; but he was dead, and as they were not actually in the possession of Ben, he could not be charged as a receiver. That was law and common sense also; moreover, the proof was wanting that the said tin box actually contained the securities in question. Furthermore, it was not desirable to have recourse to the law in the matter. After giving many hours' consideration to the perplexing case, and conferring with his active clerk, Mr. Blackstone decided first of all to offer bail for Frank, and after his release from gaol to cause a constant watch to be kept over him and his companion, in order to find out, if possible, where the box was concealed. The success of those plans was greater than even sanguine Mr. Sharp anticipated. Ben and Frank were tracked to the Fitzroy Gardens and back to their lodgings, and were then arrested, as I have already shown. On their way to the police-station they were, as if by a lucky accident, met by Mr. Blackstone himself, who prevailed upon the policemen to take the prisoners to his office. Thus, in less than two hours after the tin box was exhumed, it was, together with the parcel of manuscript, in the hands of Mr. Blackstone, and Ben and Frank were standing before him, quaking with dread that they had unwittingly committed a felony.

I need not stay to inquire on what authority the men were made prisoners, and had their persons and their boxes searched ; or by what process of law they were afterwards released from the custody of the police, at the request of Mr. Blackstone. It will scarcely be disputed by any observant person, that the law is often stretched a point or two ; and it is equally palpable that little expedients, called dodges, are occasionally resorted to in commercial, political, and even in social life, when the end is supposed to justify the means. Frank and Ben were strangers in the great city, and they had neither friends nor money—that was pretty well understood ; so they could not very well take action against the process adopted, even if they had suspected its legality. It was argued that their common-sense would naturally prompt them to keep quiet, for their own sakes ; but even if they chose to be obstreperous, as Britons sometimes are when their rights and liberties are infringed, all they could say or do would not much damage Mr. Blackstone's reputation, even if it were admitted to have been an error of his professional judgment. At any rate, no other way could be devised of getting the important box and parcel, than the bold stroke which had been carried out so nicely. The merit of the scheme was certainly due to Mr. Sharp, and it is very likely he would have had to bear the discredit of it if it had miscarried.

For an hour, during which Mr. Blackstone and his clerk were in private conference, Ben and Frank were left in the back office, to reflect on their position, which did not seem to be a very safe one ; and they both declared, that if they had foreseen the trouble that had befallen them, they would have sewn Dumby's parcel up with him in his hammock, and let the tin box lie

in the hole where he had buried it, until it turned to rust and dust. Presently Mr. Blackstone and his clerk re-entered the office, and again questioned Ben and Frank about their deceased shipmate; but they could not give any additional information.

"I have a proposal to make to you," said Mr. Blackstone. "I need not remind you that you have run a great risk of losing your liberty, through having this stolen property in your possession. However, you have nothing to fear now, the risk is all mine. I have the said property in safe custody, and it shall be sent to its proper owner as soon as possible. I propose, that if you both agree to give me the necessary evidence of the death of Mr. Marshall, and make declaration to the same in legal form, I will pay to each of you the sum of fifty pounds in cash; and in addition to that, I will undertake your defence, Mr. Shorter, at the forthcoming assizes, free of any cost to you. By the way, I may as well tell you, that I have received a letter from Captain Beckett, of the *Wolf*, which states that a certain man, named in the ship's books Andrew Hall, died at the entrance to Cook's Straits, and that his effects were left with the authorities at Wellington. It will be satisfactory to you to know that your statements to me are beyond all doubt. What do you say to my proposal? Please tell me whether you accept it or not."

Ben replied firmly, "I have told you before, sir, the reason why I cannot agree to give up to you, or to any one else save the real owner, the things that have been solemnly entrusted to me by my poor shipmate, Dum—I mean Mr. Marshall."

"Yes, you have explained your own view on the subject, Mr. Bruce, and to some extent I admire your willingness to fulfil your promise, impracticable though

it be. I wish that every man was as straightforward as you seem to be ; still you must see the risk you would run by keeping stolen property in your possession, after knowing it to have been stolen. Indeed, I should be doing you a great wrong were I to hand you back the property in question, to say nothing of the breach of duty to my clients in England."

"I don't mind taking the risk, sir, for I know I am acting fairly, and I shall be able to prove that I have not stolen the things. An honest man has nothing to fear from the law."

"I grant you that is true enough in the abstract, Mr. Bruce, but even honest men have sometimes caused themselves much trouble and loss, through lack of judgment. Besides, I think you are overlooking the fact that your friend, Mr. Shorter, is as deeply concerned in this matter as yourself—more so indeed, considering his unfortunate position, which I need not further allude to. But perhaps you had better confer together again for awhile in private. Mr. Sharp, will you step with me into the next room ? "

Ben sat for some minutes in thoughtful silence, after the lawyer and his clerk had closed the door, and then he asked, in a somewhat pettish tone, "What do you think we should do, Frank ? I wish you would speak out your mind plainly."

"I haven't been asked to speak before, mate ; but now I tell you that I think we have no more chance of handling the tin box and parcel again, than we would if they were at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. The lawyer will stick to them fast enough, so we had better agree to take the money he offers—that's my opinion, Ben."

"But what right has the lawyer to stick to the box

and parcel? Tell me that," said Ben, standing up and looking quite pugilistic.

"What right had Captain Beckett to stick to the sea-chest that poor Dumby honestly gave you with his last gasp of breath? Or what right had that big shark to swallow the knuckle of salt pork that you were towing over the side of the *Wolf*, to soak for ten minutes before you cooked it for our dinner, on the day we left Sydney harbour? Tell me that, shipmate."

"I am in no humour for joking, Frank."

"I should judge not by the look of you; nor I don't see much to joke about in anything that has happened to us to-night. I feel more ready to fight over it than to joke; but what's the use of kicking up a row? The lawyer has got the weather-gage of us, and we can't help ourselves—that's the way to look at it. Grumble as much as we may, we shan't get the things out of his hands again, whatever they are worth; and I say again, we had better take the money he offers, or we may get nothing at all, and likely enough we may get into a serious scrape if we go arguing the wrong way with him, for we don't know what devilment there may be in that tin box."

"I say again, with all my heart, I wish I had never had anything to do with Dumby's mysterious concerns," rejoined Ben, with a sigh which nearly resembled a groan.

"Ay, it would perhaps be a lucky thing for some of us poor sailors if we had never been born; but for all that here we are in the wide world, and we had better be willing to stop here and make the best of it, till our life's voyage is fairly ended. There is no good in wishing impossibilities, Ben. That's all nonsense. No doubt you have done your duty to our poor old ship-

mate, as far as you were able, and no sensible man, dead or alive, would blame you for events that you can't help."

"I wish I could shake off the dread I feel of seeing something that I don't want to see, if I willingly give up those things that were entrusted to me."

"Dumby's ghost, you mean, I suppose. I've been thinking about that too—more than I've talked of; but what can we do, mate? Hark! I hear the lawyer locking up his desk, as if he is about to make a start, so we had better decide what to say to him. I want to go home to bed."

After a few more minutes' solemn consideration, Ben said, "I suppose it is no use for us to oppose Mr. Blackstone. He won't give up Dumby's property to us if we stay here all night, so we may as well accept his terms. Rap at the door. I should like to have another word or two with him before I quite decide." Frank rapped, and Mr. Blackstone soon re-entered the room, with his hat and stick in his hand, as if he were just preparing to leave the office. He said something about their having been long over their discussion, and asked if they had come to a decision, or would they like to wait till to-morrow to decide.

"Will you pardon me for putting two plain questions, sir? Do you really mean to keep possession of the tin box and parcel that you have taken from us to-night? and are you warranted in taking the things from us in the way you have done?"

"I say, Yes; most decidedly I am justified in what I have done, Mr. Bruce, and I am quite prepared to abide by my acts. I have no alternative but to keep possession of the aforesaid property. The interests of my clients in England demand it."

"Then in that case we had better agree to accept the terms you offer us, Mr. Blackstone. For my part, I do not see how I can do otherwise."

Frank briefly said, "Just so—that's what I say, Ben; we are jammed on a lee shore."

Mr. Blackstone in a few kind words commended their judgment in the case. He then shook hands with his clients, and told them if they came to his office the next day at eleven o'clock, the business should be settled without further delay. Mr. Sharp shook hands with them outside the office, and said they might consider themselves fortunate in getting over a troublesome affair so speedily.

CHAPTER XIV.

“What ! wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice ?”

—*Shakespeare.*

“THIS has been a winning cruise for us, after all,” remarked Frank, as he and his companion walked towards their lodgings, after leaving Mr. Blackstone’s office. “When we were being marched off by constables, an hour or two ago, we didn’t expect to be going home again to-night with the certainty of gaining fifty pounds a-piece. We should have to pull and haul a long while on board ship to earn all that money, Ben.”

“No doubt of it ; but I’d much sooner work hard for money than get it in this way, Frank. We haven’t managed this affair cleverly.”

“What on earth could we do that we haven’t done, mate ? If the lawyer and his clerk have been too knowing for us, it isn’t our fault. My mind is easy enough about the affair ; and I’m glad it’s all settled fair and square—leastways it will be to-morrow.”

“I can’t help wishing again that I had never set a foot on board the *Wolf*,” rejoined Ben mournfully.

“My word, mate, it was a lucky day for you when you did so ! You will be fifty pounds richer for it, besides your wages, and you have had the honour of making my acquaintance, into the bargain. Ha, ha ! You didn’t think of that, perhaps ? But cheer up, Ben ! Let us have a glass or two together, and drink luck to the old

tin box. There's a grog-shop open at the corner yonder. Nothing like a drop of rum to rouse a fellow up when he is in the doldrums. Come on, Ben."

"You surely don't mean what you say!" exclaimed Ben, with a startled look at the sudden change in the bearing of his companion. "You cannot so soon have forgotten your promise to me?"

"I never forget anything that I pledge my word to when my head is clear and sober, Ben. I promised you not to taste grog till we had settled poor Dumby's business; and I guess we have finished it to-night, and pleasantly too, in my way of looking at it. As soon as you made up your mind to accept the lawyer's offer and let him keep Dumby's concerns, which of course you couldn't stop him from doing, directly I heard you say 'yes,' I whispered to myself, Now I am free from my promise to Ben. I have kept my word like a man, and I will have a glass or two of grog before I go to bed, just to encourage virtue. I *must* have it too, Ben, so come and take a tot with me. I'll pay for it."

"Frank, listen a moment," said Ben, stopping and holding his friend's arm firmly. "I would not have you go into Mrs. Blake's house to-night tipsy for twice the sum of money we are to receive to-morrow. The kind old lady and her daughter have had trouble enough on our account, and I wish to assure them that we are not thieves or drunkards. Come home with me, Frank. Don't go near the public-house. You know you will get drunk if you but step inside its doors."

"Yes, that is pretty certain, Ben; but inside I must go for all that, and I can't stop myself. The drinking devil has got hold of me just now, as tightly as grips to a coal-basket, and I must have a drop of grog if it blinds me. Let go my arm, shipmate."

"I will not let go your arm, Frank. The drinking fiend has no power over you unless you yield to him, and I will not let you do that to-night," said Ben resolutely. "Don't stand looking at that glaring gin-shop lamp another moment, for it has a fascinating influence over you, but come away with me. Remember how cheerful and well you have been for several weeks past without taking anything stronger than tea, and pray don't run into certain misery with your eyes open. Be a man again, Frank! Shake off this horrid influence, and go to bed sober to-night, as you have done of late, and you will be able to go with me to Mr. Blackstone's office to-morrow with a clear head and steady nerves. Do, there's a good fellow, be persuaded by me and come home."

While Ben was making his earnest appeal Frank made two or three ineffectual efforts to free himself from the firm grasp of his friend. He seemed as if debating with himself whether to use violent resistance, but presently he suffered Ben to lead him homeward.

"That was a hard struggle, Ben; worse than a hand-to-hand fight with a slaver," remarked Frank, after he had walked some distance in silence. "It was a short fight but a severe one. I have conquered my old foe this time, and I feel heartily glad of it. Many thanks for your help, shipmate. I could no more have done it alone than I could heave up a frigate's best bower anchor single-handed. Now, Ben, while I am calm, and before the craving fit comes on me again, I promise, on the word of a man, that I will not touch or taste grog again for——"

"As long as you live," interposed Ben.

"No, mate, I won't say that. Though I just now seem to hate grog with a mortal hatred, I have not confidence

enough in myself to make a promise of total abstinence from grog for life ; but for six months from this blessed hour I will be a teetotaller to the backbone. Here is my hand again, Ben, and I pledge you the word of a man." As Ben took his proffered hand, Frank added in a more cheerful tone, "Now I shall feel safe for a while ; but if you had not kept such a firm hold of me just now, I should be half seas over, as the saying is by this time, and perhaps be fighting drunk an hour hence, and then it would have been dangerous for even you to lay a hand upon me. Oh dear ! what a powerful influence grog has over a poor wretch who has learned to love it more than he loves his own immortal soul ! Happy fellow you are, Ben, who never got your blood tainted with it before you were born. Your parents were sober people, I'll be bound, or you wouldn't be so tame as you are."

"I do not believe that my poor mother or my grandmother were ever the worse for drink, if they ever tasted it at all."

"I thought as much, Ben, and you may bless your stars for the happy fact ; that, in a great measure, may account for your strict sobriety. My father was a drunkard. It may seem undutiful of me to say as much as that against the poor old man's character, now he is dead and gone, but it is a sad fact that he loved drink more than he loved his own immortal soul, and his son Frank has inherited infirmities of the same nature, worse luck. But we will not say any more about it—I hate the subject. I am on the sober tack now, and you shall see that I will not vary half a point in my course for six months from this lucky evening."

Mrs. Blake was in bed, but she was not asleep, when Ben and Frank knocked at the front door. She soon

let them in, and kindly offered to light a fire and make them a cup of tea, but they would not allow her to do it. It was a wonderful relief to her mind that they had returned so soon.

"I told you we should soon be back again, ma'am, to convince you that we are not rogues and vagabonds," said Frank. "Our story is too long to tell you to-night, but you shall hear all about it to-morrow. Now you go to bed again, ma'am. Good-night! sorry we disturbed you."

Soon after breakfast the next morning, Frank and Ben went straightway to the lawyer's office. Mr. Blackstone received them cordially, and was evidently in a pleasant mood. After a few minutes' conversation with them both, he asked Frank to step with him into the adjoining room, where sat Mr. Sharp at a table which was nearly covered with photographs of men in various garbs, and Frank was asked to pick out Mr. Marshall's likeness from the group. Frank gazed at the pictures one by one from the first to the last, and then said confidently, "He is not among that lot. There isn't one of them good-looking enough for him."

"Are you sure of it?" asked Mr. Blackstone.

"As sure as you are that I am standing here, sir."

"Will you see if he is in this group?" said Mr. Sharp, uncovering another table with about an equal number of photographs on it.

Frank looked up and down the first and second row, and then selecting the bottom picture in the third row he exclaimed, "That's Mr. Marshall; or the man we used to call Dumby, because we could never get him to tell us who he was, or where he came from."

Frank was then told to step into the front office again, and Ben was submitted to a similar test, and he also

selected the same photograph. Mr. Blackstone thereupon expressed himself as perfectly satisfied. In the course of the afternoon a declaration and other legal documents were signed by Ben and Frank, before a notary, and then they returned to their lodgings, each with fifty pounds in his pocket. The business had been completed with less delay than is usually attendant upon legal transactions of so much importance.

After tea that evening, Frank gave a tolerably full account of the peculiar business that had brought him and his friend to Melbourne, while Mrs. Blake and her daughter sat and listened with marked interest. In some parts of the narrative, when Ben's broken limb was alluded to, Annie looked so sympathising that no observer could possibly doubt the tender susceptibility of her nature—the softness of her heart.

“It was a sad end for the unfortunate man,” remarked Mrs. Blake, when Frank had finished his story about poor Dumby's death and burial at sea. “If his parents are alive, they will no doubt be deeply grieved when they hear of the fate of their wandering son. Alas! many prodigal sons have ended their days in this land in a similar dreadful way.”

“It would have been a lucky thing for our poor shipmate if he had lived to hear of the fortune that is left to him,” said Frank.

“Perhaps so,” remarked Mrs. Blake. “But if he was an intemperate man, which I suspect was the case, his fortune would not have benefited him, and it may now fall into the hands of some one who will do good with it. I heartily wish it may. I was told a short time ago of a young man who was working in a claim at one of the large diggings in this colony, who quite unexpectedly received news that he was left a fortune. He at once

left his gold-digging work and began to drink to excess, and to treat any one on the diggings who would drink at his expense. He soon became partially insane, and went about from one inn to another exhibiting the photograph which had been sent to him of his mansion in Yorkshire. At length he was put under restraint, but it was too late to save his life. He had drunk to such an extent that *delirium tremens* ensued, and he died raving mad, only a few weeks after receiving the news of his accession to a large fortune."

"It seems to me that there are many lucky fellows out here who suddenly fall in for large fortunes. I wonder if it will ever be my turn," said Frank.

"There are many young men in this land who belong to respectable families in England and elsewhere," replied Mrs. Blake. "They have been attracted here by reports of the rich fruits in the goldfields, and that is why we hear of so many cases of the sort you allude to. A friend of mine, who is clerk to an auctioneer in Melbourne, told me that he has often seen family relics, in the shape of old-fashioned jewellery or rare books, at pawnbrokers' sales of unredeemed pledges, which had evidently been pawned by young men of respectable connections. I suppose you intend to send that unfortunate young man's Bible to his mother, Mr. Bruce?" added Mrs. Blake in a feeling tone.

Ben stammered out a reply in the affirmative. But the question made him feel uneasy again. He meant to have given the Bible to Mr. Blackstone, to send home with the parcel of manuscript, but had forgotten to do so. Soon afterwards Ben returned to his room, lest Mrs. Blake and her daughter should observe the depression which was again stealing over him, despite his efforts to rally it away.

"I think Mr. Bruce is a very kind-hearted young man," remarked Mrs. Blake, when Ben had left the room. "I have noticed that whenever the late unfortunate Mr. Dumby——"

"Excuse me, ma'am, Marshall was his name. Sailors always get some queer nicknames, same as boys do at school."

"Yes, so I have heard before, Mr. Shorter. Sailors are funny men. I was going to say, whenever Mr. Marshall has been spoken of here, Mr. Bruce seemed to feel very much for the poor man's sad fate."

"Ay, Ben is as tender-hearted as a woman, though he has got pluck enough for an admiral when it's the right time to show it."

"He is very quiet," said Miss Blake, with a half sigh.

"Yes, miss, he is quiet, except when anything uncommon rouses him up, but he has sense to guide his talk when he goes at it. Some shipmates that I have sailed with, who had more tongue than brains, have been regular fore-castle nuisances all through their watch below. I haven't come across a young fellow in all my life's cruising that I seem to take to so naturally as I do to Ben; and it's because he is so fair and above-board in all his doings, and so considerate for everybody about him."

"I am sure I have reason to remember his kindness, and yours too, Mr. Shorter," said Mrs. Blake.

"Oh, as for me, I'm nobody, ma'am. By your leave, I'll tell you just one little act of Ben's, that will show you what sort of mettle he has got. We were strolling together not long ago, along a sandy road in the outskirts of the city of Newcastle, when we saw a great surly fellow beating a horse because it could not trot along with a cart that was nearly heavy enough for two

horses. He was hitting the poor brute over the ears with the butt-end of his whip, and cursing at every blow; so Ben walked up to him and said, in a voice like a commanding officer, 'Leave that horse alone!' The fellow turned round, looking savage enough to fight; but there was something in Ben's manly look that cowed him as much as a roaring lion could have done. He let out some blackguard talk, of course, but we did not see him hit the horse again. We watched the cart till it got into the city, and then I said to Ben, 'What would you have done, mate, if that horse-slaughterer hadn't stowed his whip when you gave the word of command?'

"Said Ben, 'I would have told him that there was a law to protect dumb animals from ill usage, and that I meant to get him punished for his cruelty; and I should perhaps have quietly followed the cart until I met a policeman to take charge of the fellow; but, you see, I have been spared that trouble, Frank. In general, a word or two spoken in a resolute tone to such a character as he is enough to frighten him. No one but a rank coward would beat a poor, overloaded horse, as that man was doing.'"

Mrs. Blake said it was noble of Mr. Bruce to speak up in defence of a poor, ill-used animal; and it was plain enough, from the approving look of Miss Annie, that she coincided in her mother's opinion.

"My friend Ben is a regular John Bull," added Frank. "I don't believe he could possibly stand by and see unfair play, in any shape or form, without trying to stop it. There are some crawling animals, in the shape of men, who wouldn't stir hand or tongue to benefit anybody or anything but themselves. 'Let the world wag on its old-fashioned course, it will last long enough for

us.' That's their talk—or the meaning of it. Ugh! the lazy, selfish lubbers! I'd have them all sent to sea in leaky ships, and make them pump for their lives. I wish you good-night, ladies."

Frank then lighted his bedroom candle and retired.

"I do really like to hear Mr. Shorter talk. He is so honest and outspoken," remarked Mrs. Blake to her daughter.

"Yes, and he seems to understand the character of Mr. Bruce so thoroughly, and is so very fond of him," tenderly responded Annie.

CHAPTER XV.

"Look round the habitable world, how few
Know their own good, or knowing it pursue."

—*Dryden.*

"HALLO, shipmate! Are you going to lie in bed all day for a treat? It is nearly eight bells, and I hear our landlady getting breakfast ready. Come, rouse out, or we shall perhaps have cold coffee." That was Frank's first address to his sleepy companion on the following morning. "If your bed were as hard as mine was in the gaol, you would be glad to get up to rest yourself."

"Oh, dear! I didn't know it was so late," said Ben, as he sat up in his bed looking scarcely more than half awake. "Yawgh! I don't think I have slept two hours since the clock struck one."

"Surely that's a miscalculation of yours, Ben, and I guess you were asleep when you made it. I woke up twice in the middle watch, and you were snoring like a sea-horse with a little crab in his nozzle. Young fellows don't often make such a scaring noise as that when they are wide awake."

"Well, perhaps I have been sleeping and dreaming; but I could almost declare solemnly that I have been having a real chat with poor Dumby, and that he was sitting on that chest for half the night."

"Ha, ha! that was nightmare; the effect of the bread and cheese and onions that you ate for supper. I often dream about queer things when I am sleeping

on shore, after feasting on the fat of the land, as the saying is."

"If it wasn't a reality, it was one of the strangest dreams I ever had. Ah, you may laugh, Frank, but I believe there is something significant in it all, although I am not quite so superstitious as Mr. Blackstone fancies I am."

"I couldn't help laughing at your solemn-looking phiz, Ben. But I won't laugh again. Let me hear about your dream, and perhaps I can guess what it means. I remember that the carpenter of the *Hazard* dreamt one night when we were at sea, that his youngest boy had tumbled down a well and was drowned. When he told me his dream, I said, 'You may depend on it, Chips, that the very reverse of it has happened; for dreams always go by contraries. I have heard that said a hundred times or more. Sure enough, when we got home after our cruise, the first thing Chips heard was that his eldest daughter was married to a rich grocer, and that his boy had not been drowned at all, for the little fellow came on board our ship at Portsmouth with a letter for his father soon after the anchor was let go.'"

"That was a fortunate reverse certainly; but my dream cannot possibly be reversed, because we know that Dumby is dead. I fancied I saw him sitting on that chest, and looking just as he looked on the night he crawled out of his berth in the forecastle of the *Wolf*; and he talked to me quite friendly, but in very mournful tones. No, Frank, he didn't say anything concerning the tin box or the parcel, and that's what I seemed afraid he'd come to talk to me about. Poor old fellow! he looked so miserable, I can't get his image out of my mind."

"It's very strange, Ben. But it's a good job he didn't seem cross with you for your bad luck with his concerns. What did he say to you?"

"I can't recollect much that he said, for I was naturally scared at seeing what seemed to me to be Dumbly himself. Perhaps I shall remember more of it presently. But what do you think of my dream, Frank? Now, don't laugh again, there's a good fellow, but tell me what your opinion is of it."

"It is best not to say too much about things one doesn't understand, mate. It beats all my knowledge, that is the plainest way to answer you. Let us come and have breakfast, and we'll talk over this affair again when we have more time to spare. Our good old landlady is as punctual as a ship's bell with our meals, and I like to be up to time too."

In the evening the two friends took a walk together to the Carlton Gardens. While they were sitting quietly on one of the rustic seats in that very pleasant resort, Frank asked his companion if he had been thinking any more about his mysterious dream of the previous night.

"Yes, indeed I have, Frank. I could scarcely think of anything else all day," replied Ben. "I have a strong inclination to go to England. I should like to see my dear grandmother again, now that I have a little money to give her; and I am sure she will be delighted to see me—poor old soul!"

"I think you had better send what money you can spare by the next mail to your grandmother, and stop here and make some more. Fifty pounds isn't much of a fortune to carry home, and you cannot take so much as that, unless you work your passage."

"That's true, Frank, and I am sure I can make a

better living in this part of the world than I can at home. Still I feel a sort of craving impulse to go and see Dumby's mother (I have her address), and carry her the Bible that I forgot to give Mr. Blackstone. I dare say she will be glad to get that relic of her lost son, even if she does not care to hear all I could tell her about him. Perhaps she may be generous enough to pay me for my trouble."

"Very likely it may be something in your pocket, Ben. Anyway, if you feel such a strong fancy to go home, I won't try to stop you; but I hope you won't start till you see what they do with me at the assize."

"Of course I shall stop till your case is decided, Frank. I would not leave you dishonestly for any consideration in the world."

"Thank you, Ben; I know you have good feelings for me. I don't suppose the judges will hang me unless they go to the full stretch of the law; but there is no saying, for law is very uncertain. If the jury are persuaded to believe that I tried to murder old Leary, then I am afraid it will go hard with me. I get rather dreary over it sometimes, which is natural enough to a man who is in dread of losing his life or his liberty."

"I do not think you need fear much, Frank. Mr. Blackstone told me that he felt sure you would be acquitted, though he did not like to say as much to you, lest it should make you over-confident."

"No fear of getting too high-spirited, Ben. I am glad you have told me what the lawyer said, for a little comfort is better than none. If I do get safely out of this scrape, I'll go to England with you, if you would like to have my company."

"I should like your company very much, Frank."

"Then if I get free I'll go with you. I haven't seen the dear old land for nearly thirty years, so I'll go and see if my sister Sally is alive. These fifty sovereigns will burn a hole in my pocket and tumble out if I stay in Melbourne. I must go to sea for my health's sake, and I may as well go a voyage to London as elsewhere. If I can't ship as seaman on board the vessel that you go in, I'll pay my passage and go to sea for once in my life as an independent gentleman."

For the ensuing month Ben and Frank lived very comfortably at their lodgings. They usually spent a part of each day in the public library, and in seeing the various places of attraction with which the fine city of Melbourne abounds. Their evenings were passed by the home fireside; and the society of the hostess and her daughter was very agreeable, so much so that Frank remarked to Ben, in his dry way, one night after they had retired to their bedroom, that if he were to live much longer at that easy rate, he should be spoilt for a sailor. To which Ben replied with a sigh, that he should miss the society of Mrs. and Miss Blake very much after he left their house, for they had been like a mother and a sister to him.

"Better than a sister, I think, Ben. But joking apart, I believe that dear old lady knows as much about religion as the chaplain of our frigate did, and perhaps more; at any rate, the way she talks about it, seems to be more plain and hearty like. I don't profess to be a first-rate judge of prayers, more's the pity, but her prayer to-night seemed to be more solemn and earnest than anything of the sort that I ever heard before, especially when she put in a word or two for sailors who are knocking about at sea in the hard gale that is

now blowing. That touched my heart like a warm hand, and I said to myself, that's Christianity."

"I confess I did not much fancy her religious services every night when I first came to lodge here, but I like them now, and I think I shall make up my mind to say my prayers every night before I turn into bed."

"It can't do you any harm, mate, and it may perhaps do you good. It comes rather hard on a poor fellow, if he is in danger of going down at sea, and he is ashamed to pray to God to help him, as I have been many times."

"I never was ashamed to pray to God, Frank, though I have seldom thought of doing so since I left my grandmother's roof. I don't see why a man should be ashamed or afraid to pray."

"I will tell you what I mean, Ben. I was on board of a ship once that got badly strained in a gale of wind, and after floundering about like a water-logged punt for seven hours, she went down under us, and drowned six of the crew. I prayed to God that night, as I was working at the pumps, and vowed that if He would let me get safe on shore I would give over all my wicked tricks, and behave myself for the rest of my life. I honestly meant what I said; but I am sorry to tell you that I hadn't landed much above an hour before I got drunk and knocked down the coxswain of the lifeboat that brought me on shore from the wreck—the man who risked his life to save me. Ever since that awfully shabby trick of mine, I have been ashamed to pray to God when I have been in danger—it would only look like mockery. Oh dear me! I wish I wasn't such a wicked old sinner, Ben, then I would pray to God every night of my life. It must be comforting for a poor fellow to know that if death were to come skulking over him

while he was asleep, his soul would be safe for the next world."

The anxiously looked for day of Frank's trial came, and he appeared in court without being looked after by his bailee. Mrs. and Miss Blake and Ben were also in attendance as witnesses. The case for the prosecution was fully gone into, and, as stated by the Attorney-General and sworn to by Mr. Leary, it looked as clear a case of murderous assault and robbery as ever was brought into court. But there are two sides to a story, and it is not often that they are at all alike. When evidence for the defence was heard, it threw a different aspect on the case, and poor Frank felt less like a doomed man. If Mr. Leary had any sense of shame, he must have been keenly touched by the address of the learned counsel for the defence, when he pictured with manly feeling the heinous conduct of the prosecutor, in dogging a young innocent girl on her way home from her workshop, and seeking by deceitful wiles and the temptation of his purse, to mislead her from the path of virtue—in fact, trying his utmost to make another unhappy subject for the reforming efforts of the lady directors of the Female Refuge, or another poor degraded inmate for the Destitute Asylum.

The jury, without leaving the box, acquitted Frank on the charge of robbery. They found him guilty of a common assault, but on the ground of the justifiable character of it they strongly recommended the prisoner to mercy. The learned judge then made a few stringent remarks on the disposition of some men of position in the community to mislead young and virtuous women, and then he pronounced sentence on Frank, which was that he be kept in custody until the rising of the court. Frank touched his forelock to the judge, and took a

seat in a corner of the dock, looking as pleased as if he had just been awarded a gold medal for jumping overboard and saving a life, while Mr. Leary stalked out of court with feelings of a totally different character gnawing at his heart. Ben waited outside the court until the close of the day, and then he walked home beside his liberated friend to their lodgings, where they were joyfully welcomed by their hostess and her daughter.

As a member of the committee of the Female Refuge, Sydney, some years ago, I had many sad opportunities of seeing unfortunate young victims of the cruel treachery of such men as Mr. Leary. The "social evil," as it is called, is one that I feel extreme delicacy in enlarging upon in my books; still I do not think the evil will be remedied in any way by public writers or speakers being altogether passive or silent on the subject.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Courageous, and refreshed for future toil,
If toil awaits me, or if dangers new.”

—*Cowper.*

THE result of Frank's trial was scarcely less a cause of gladness to himself than it was to his friend, Ben, and to his kind landlady and her daughter. Poor Mrs. Blake wept for joy when she got home. It had been a day of unusual excitement for her and Annie. Neither of them had, until then, been in a court of justice, and the idea of standing up before a judge and jury, and a large assemblage of learned lawyers, was almost terrifying to them, and the anticipation of the ordeal had been the worry of their lives by day and the spoiler of their rest by night, for several weeks. They had often heard and read of witnesses, under cross-examination by learned counsel, having very humiliating and even indelicate questions put to them, and they both decided that, if it were not for the sake of Mr. Shorter, they would make any sacrifice or put up with any personal indignity rather than appear in court as witnesses. Similar resolutions have been made, perhaps hundreds of times, by weakly, sensitive women, and thus unprincipled men have often escaped punishment for their misdoings.

But the ordeal was less troublesome to Mrs. Blake and her daughter than they had foreboded. The counsel for the prosecution was a considerate gentleman. Doubt-

less he saw that he had a bad case to advocate—at any rate he did not seek to advance it by assailing the characters of the two principal witnesses, who, it was plainly to be seen, were respectable women. Ben was not so reasonably dealt with. He was severely cross-questioned, and especially as to his antecedents and his connection with the prisoner. He was sorely perplexed when pressed to tell what trade or calling his father was ; and it was a merciful relief to him when the question was overruled ; but he was forced to confess that he had run away from his grandmother, which admission caused a slight sensation in the court. The witness-box was worse than a pillory to poor Ben, and he showed far more nervous excitement than his friend Frank showed in the dock. He was glad when the trial was over.

“ I do believe I am a regular old simpleton, Ben,” remarked Frank, as he was preparing for bed on the night of his liberation from court.

“ When did you make that unsatisfactory discovery ? ” Ben asked, with a smile at the unusual seriousness of Frank’s face.

“ I have suspected it for many years, Ben, but I never was so convinced of it as I am at present. I think that old lady’s sensible talk, and her prayers every night, have made me overhaul myself more closely than I ever did before ; and being sober-headed, I have thought more sensibly of things of late. Often as we have sat in the Melbourne Public Library, I have fancied, with regret, that if I had for years past only spent a few hours each week in getting a little knowledge into this bemuddled old head of mine, I might have cruised along life’s course ten times easier than I have done, and I should not have had so much time for learning wicked tricks, that I would

give my ears if I could unlearn. Besides, I might have had a shot or two in the locker, to provide against the time when I shall be hove aside as unseaworthy. I shall be fifty years old come December, and I have been doing nothing but mischief ever since I came into the world. I am ashamed of myself, Ben. Ah, you may smile, my lad! but I mean every word I say this time. I have never done any good in the world since the day I was born, but I have done a lot of roguery."

"Come, come! don't be so hard on yourself, Frank. You have certainly done some good since I have known you; I can honestly certify to that. For instance, you gave that wicked rogue Leary, who was trying to work misery in this home, a sound thrashing, that he will perhaps remember to his benefit. Besides, you mended my broken leg and the wounds on my head, and you pumped day and night on board the *Wolf*, and perhaps saved her from foundering and drowning me, for I could not have escaped in a boat. I have good reason to be grateful for your services in that way."

"Ah, I have had plenty of pumping in leaky old ships, if there is any merit in that work, Ben. But if I had not been a fool I should not have had so much of such back-breaking work to do."

"How do you make that out, Frank? You were not the cause of the ship's leaking, I suppose?"

"No, I was not, mate; but if I had been wise enough years ago to learn my profession properly, I need not be now a mere common sailor; I should have risen a bit, as other men have done who hadn't a better start off in life than I had. I know several men who at the present time are masters of vessels, and they had not half the chance that I have had to pick up a thorough knowledge of seamanship. But they were sober-headed fellows, and

had common-sense enough to learn their profession properly, so they are masters now, and some of them are part owners too, while I am nobody at all."

"Yes, yes, you are somebody, Frank. I overheard the captain of the *Wolf* say to the mate one day, that you were a first-rate seaman. If he could say as much for me, I should feel a sight more independent than I do now."

"No doubt I am well up in practical seamanship, Ben, and so I ought to be after being at sea thirty-five years. I could handle a vessel of any rig perhaps as well as many seamen in Hobson's Bay; but I know nothing at all about navigation, so I never could get command of a ship, or even a second mate's berth, unless it were in a small coaster. I have been a precious fool all my days, Ben, and you needn't try to persuade me that I haven't, for I know myself better than you do. But I am going to try another tack from this day forward. 'It is never too late to mend,' as our good old landlady said to-night, when she was telling us of her greengrocer, who turned quite sober and pious in his old age. For the next six months, if I live, I am bound to keep sober, for I promised you to do so; and I am going to try if I can in the meantime learn to be a navigator. It will be no use of me trying when I am off my sober tack, so now is the time if I am ever to do it."

"Success to your plans, Frank! I say that with all my heart."

"Thank you, Ben. I'll try my best, anyway. I have lately read in the public library yonder, of lots of poor fellows who have risen to be great men in the world, and some of them in their young days had even less schooling than I had when I was a boy. I don't expect to be a great man, but if I can learn to work a ship's reckoning

I may get a mate's berth, and then I shall have better pay and less hard work. If you have anything to say against that honest scheme, out with it."

"I think it is a very sensible scheme, Frank. When are you going to begin your studies, and who will teach you?"

"You know I am going home in the same ship with you, Ben, and I shall go as a steerage passenger, then my time will be my own, and I can go to work like an almanac maker. I have money in my pocket, and no doubt I shall find some one on board who will give me all the teaching I want, if I pay for it. I have made up my mind, if I live, that I shall be able to say, before I am fifty years old, I can navigate a ship to any part of the known world."

CHAPTER XVII.

"Hurrah ! hurrah for England, Her woods and valleys green,
Hurrah for good old England ! Hurrah for England's Queen."

—*M. A. Stodart*

"THIS is the craft for us," said Frank to his friend Ben, and at the same time he stopped before the *Monarch*, a large frigate-built ship that was lying at the railway pier, Sandridge. They had previously inspected all the other vessels that were laid on the berth for London. "This is the ship to my fancy, Ben. Perhaps she isn't so fast as some of the big clippers that we have just looked at, but she is a comfortable ship in bad weather, I'll warrant, from the build of her, and she will stand up well under her canvas. A man may have a chance of walking her decks on his two legs, and with a dry coat on his back. If we are a week or two longer on the passage, it doesn't matter to us, so long as the provisions don't run short ; we shall have nothing extra to pay, and it will be an easy life for us."

"I like that ship better," replied Ben, pointing to a smart Liverpool clipper, which was lying on the opposite side of the pier.

"I daresay most landsmen would agree with you, mate. That is a noble-looking ship and a fast sailor, but I don't like her lean bows and long, narrow hull. She must be wet in a sea-way—a regular diver ; and

many a poor unlucky sailor has had a cold dip when out on her gibboom, at that nice little job stowing the jib."

"What beautiful long masts she has, Frank!"

"Yes, they look very pretty; but you wouldn't fancy their tauntness if you were to make a voyage in her as an ordinary seaman. It would be no joke to skim up to those skysail yards, and not safe work either. If I were a captain I would never have a skysail set on board my ship. I hate all such dangerous shams; and I don't think I'd be bothered with stern sails. It is a cold voyage round the Horn, Ben, and as I have been used to warm latitudes for many years, I shall like to go home in a ship that will not always have water sluicing about her decks."

After a little more discussion, Ben expressed himself willing to go in the *Monarch* if Frank liked her best; so they went on board, and as nearly all the steerage berths were disengaged they were allowed to take their choice, which they proceeded to do in a deliberate way.

"Starboard side of the ship, Ben," said Frank, as he put a chalk mark on two upper berths in the 'tween decks. "This will be the weather side in the trade-winds, you know, and we shall have a chance of keeping our port open for fresh air, while the lee ports will perhaps be under water."

"I shouldn't have thought of that if you hadn't, Frank."

"Very likely not, mate; but you would think of it before you got to London, I'll engage. We may as well have all the comforts we can get."

When they had selected their berths they went to Melbourne, and paid the agent of the ship for their passage, eighteen pounds each. They were told to be

on board on next Saturday night, as the *Monarch* would be towed to sea early on Sunday morning. Sunday is a favourite day for sailing with some captains, more's the pity.

"Now we must go and lay in our sea stock, Ben. But first of all come along with me, and see if I can make a deal for some nautical concerns that I was looking at yesterday. I think I can pick up a good bargain."

They entered a pawnbroker's shop in Elizabeth Street, and after a little haggling Frank bought a sextant, a telescope, and a case of mathematical instruments, also several books on navigation and some charts, all in one lot. The pawnbroker said the articles belonged to the second mate of an emigrant ship, who had gone crazy about a girl who came out in the ship with him. She had agreed to marry him; and after getting all his money from him to buy a wedding outfit, she cruelly gave him the slip. The poor fellow then pawned all his effects and drank himself mad with the money. "He is now in Yarra-bend lunatic asylum," added the pawnbroker, "so he won't want his nautical instruments again in a hurry, and I may as well let you have them. They are first-rate articles, as you can see. Let me sell you a good chronometer cheap, captain, as well as this lot."

"Ha, ha! captain indeed!" laughed Frank. "I haven't got so far aft yet, mister, so I don't want a chronometer. My old silver watch will do me for this voyage; and if it should stop, the ship's bell will help me to keep my reckoning near enough. I will call for these things this evening."

"We can carry them with us now, Frank; we are going home," said Ben.

"Never mind, mate. I would rather come for them after dark. If I were to meet any of my old shipmates they would laugh to see me with a sextant in my hand and a telescope under my arm. They'd think I was trying to show off before strangers, for they all know that I am not a navigator, and they might perhaps play off some nautical joke on me."

"Sailors are queer fellows," remarked Ben.

"Ay, some of them are too queer to be pleasant or safe companions; but there are other sailors of quite a different sort—and good luck to them! Some time ago a big iron ship came into Sydney harbour, from London, and hove alongside the wharf next to where my ship was lying. After supper on the night after she arrived, all hands (except the cook, who was left as shipkeeper) dressed up in their Sunday clothes, and, headed by the captain and the officers, away they marched up Pitt Street to the Temperance Hall. They halted in front of the building and sang 'God Save the Queen,' in real sailors' style. Of course crowds of people rushed up to see what was going on, for it was a very uncommon turn-out in Sydney. When they had done singing, the captain made a short off-hand speech, and asked the people to go inside and hear what else he had to say. The sailors then went into the hall and took seats on the platform. The place was filled in a few minutes, and there were scores of people who could not get in. Then the captain got up and talked to the company like a parson; and he told them that every one of his officers and crew was a teetotaller, and what was better still they were all Christian men, bound to the fair haven above. He said a lot, too, about the peace and good order they always had on board his ship. Some of the sailors also made short speeches,

and there were some hymns sung and prayers said, and then they all marched back to their ship again. While the ship was in port, hosts of sailors belonging to other ships went on board; to Bethel services that were held there, and many hundreds of them signed the temperance pledge, and promised to behave themselves like men as long as they lived. That captain was a thoroughbred sailor as well as a good Christian, and all his men were as proud of him as the crew of the old *Victory* were of Lord Nelson. There were never any bullying words heard on board, and the men weren't asked to do a hand's turn of unnecessary work on Sundays. That's the sort of fair play that helps to make a contented crew, Ben. I only wish we could go home in such a well-manned ship as the *Cossipore*, and with such a good master as Captain McGowan. His life's cruising is over now, but I have no doubt he has got safe home to 'The land that has no storms.'"

Ben's frequent visits to the magnificent public library in Melbourne had given a wonderful stimulus to his desire for useful knowledge, and his relish for books was greater than he had ever before experienced. Soon after leaving the pawnbroker's shop, he called at a bookseller's and laid out four pounds in serviceable books, including the "Popular Educator"; also several very useful books for a young student, by the Rev. Paxton Hood.

"You look as if you mean to be a scholar!" said Frank, as they walked homeward, Ben carrying the parcel of books under his arm.

"I hardly expect to be much of a scholar, Frank; but I should like to know a little more of the wonders of the world I live in. I am going to follow your sensible example, and employ my three months of leisure on

shipboard to some advantage. I have dawdled away too much of my time, but I am determined to turn over a new leaf."

"It is a good job for you that you have come to that stand before your hair is as grey as mine, Ben ; because you haven't so much to unlearn. And I am thinking it is a lucky thing for us both that we came to Melbourne ; for having the free run of that fine library yonder has put new brains into our heads, or roused up our old stock, which is just as good perhaps ; and living in that godly and righteous old woman's house has done my heart more good than a volume of printed sermons could do me, because I should perhaps never read them."

"Living there has affected my heart," said Ben, with a soft look, which his companion evidently understood, for he replied in a tone of fatherly admonition.

"I guessed as much ; but steer steadily there, Ben. Unless you have a notion of coming back to this land, don't do or say anything to make that poor little girl's heart sad after we are gone, for that would be as cruel sport as shooting albatrosses at sea, and leaving the poor broken-winged birds to starve on the water, or get pecked to death by other birds, because they are helpless."

"Don't trouble about that, Frank. I never could imagine how that sort of wanton shooting could be called sport, though I have seen some passengers on board ship take delight in it ; nor can I believe that a man who would trifle with a young girl's affections has much honest principle in his heart. If I cannot do that little maid any good I will never do her any harm, Frank. It would be a base return for all the kindness we have received from her mother and herself."

On Saturday evening, Ben and Frank said farewell to Mrs. and Miss Blake, and started in a car for Sandridge, with all their luggage, and went on board the *Monarch*. At daylight next morning two steam tugs came alongside and took the ship in tow, and by four o'clock in the afternoon they were at sea, and making sail to a fair wind. Frank had never before been on board a ship as a passenger, and it seemed strange to him to be inactive at the sound of the boatswain's whistle. On one or two occasions during the voyage he checked himself when in the act of springing into the rigging, at the call to shorten sail or to rig out sternsail booms. He resolved not to go aloft unless in a case of emergency, but he was always willing to pull at a rope on deck ; and help from his hands was more acceptable to the crew than the jerky efforts of three ordinary passengers, who had not learnt to pull together.

There were three midshipmen on board, two of whom were of the careless, rollicking sort, and spent most of their time, when off duty, smoking and playing at cards, or lying in their berths reading books which were not calculated to inspire them with manly principles. They confessed that they had been sent to sea because they were unmanageable on shore. They had no taste for their profession, and took no pride in learning it. But the third and eldest of them was a steady youth, of opposite tastes to his companions, with whom he did not mess very agreeably. He was the son of a clergyman, and had evidently not forgotten the good early training he received in his parental home. He had chosen the sea in preference to any other profession, and he showed promise of becoming an expert seaman. His spare hours below were devoted to studies in navigation and other scientific subjects, and as the midshipmen's berth

was not a desirable place for a quiet student when his messmates were in it, he was often glad to get into the starboard side of the steerage, which Ben and Frank had all to themselves, as there were only two other steerage passengers—a man and his wife who occupied the port side. Nothing could have happened more fortunate for Frank and Ben; for Mr. Wallace, the senior midshipman, was a very obliging young gentleman, and he most willingly agreed to instruct Frank in navigation, and also to help Ben to master some of the difficulties in his course of self-education; indeed, he seemed to take a pride in his adult pupils, and was repaid for his attention by their assiduity and the fair progress they made in their several studies. Thus the first half of their voyage was passed agreeably and profitably.

“I don’t wonder, Ben, that passengers on long voyages so often get cross and quarrelsome,” said Frank, as he and his companion sat under the lee of the longboat one warm afternoon. They had been about two months at sea, and were slowly sailing along with a light north-east trade-wind. I don’t think I would go to sea again as a passenger, if I were offered a free passage and half pay to boot, for an idle life is misery to me. All my limbs seem to be getting rusty for want of work, like a steam-engine that has been standing still for two years.”

“But you have not been idle since you came on board this ship, Frank, until the heat of the tropics has driven us up from our schoolroom ’tween decks. I consider that we have stuck to our books like good boys, and Mr. Wallace has said as much as that in our favour. You are out of trim just now, Frank. The extreme heat, together with your close study, has affected your head a little, no doubt. I don’t feel quite well myself,

but a few days' rest from our books and a little more exercise on deck will put us to rights, and when we run into a cooler climate we shall be able to go at our studies again with fresh vigour."

"I dare say you are right, Ben. It is no joke for an old fellow like me to sit down at schoolboy's work for eight weeks on a stretch. It is not so hard for you, because your young mind is elastic, but mine is like a strand of old junk—precious hard to get the turns out of it, or like that iron mainmast—no spring at all in it."

"But you have shown that your mind is still pliant or springy, Frank," replied Ben encouragingly. "Mr Wallace told me he is surprised at the progress you have made in trigonometry in so short a time, and he says you will make a good navigator after you have had more practice. He is proud of you as a pupil, I can assure you."

"I am glad he is pleased, Ben ; he has had a deal of patience with me, and I shall always owe him my gratitude. The first tackling into hard dry lessons in navigation, was to me as disagreeable as sitting down in a dentist's easy chair to have a lot of old stumps punched out ; but I have conquered the worst part, and I will stick to it till the end of the voyage. If I never muster courage enough to pass an examination for a master's or a mate's certificate, the knowledge I have picked up cannot do me any harm, and it has saved me from dawdling about the decks, yarning about small stuff and nonsense, and smoking myself stupid for want of some active occupation. Wholesome work is a boon and a blessing to a man, Ben. You may put that down in your log-book as a fact which wiser heads than mine have acknowledged, although I do believe that some dozy fellows in the world think it would be almost as

good as heaven itself to have nothing to do but smoke all day long. Yes," added Frank emphatically, "work is a boon to mankind, no doubt; but I can't say that I like working up logarithms; I would sooner be stropping blocks, or tarring down the rigging."

The *Monarch* was not so fast as some of the large clipper ships in the Melbourne trade, but she was a comfortable vessel, as Frank had prejudged. Under a press of sail she lifted to the waves instead of plunging through them, and as she was only safely laden she rarely shipped heavy water on deck. It is doubtless essential, for many reasons, to insure speed in the construction of our merchant ships, but it is very desirable also for the comfort of passengers—of fore-cabin passengers especially—that ships should be moderately dry on deck. It is exhilarating to most persons to be sailing onward at a rapid pace towards a desired port, but it lessens the delight of a passenger, if he cannot look out at the dancing waves without the risk of being washed off his legs into the lee scuppers, or perhaps of being washed overboard altogether. That it is possible to combine speed with comfort in large ships, is clearly proved in several of the most successful ships that trade to Australia, and it would be well for passengers, and for sailors also, if that combination of good qualities was more generally sought for by shipowners.

The foregoing remarks were expressed by me, some years before the direct line of magnificent steamers were laid on to the Australian colonies, and which now almost monopolise the passenger traffic. Still there are many colonists of the old-fashioned sort, who would rather "take a trip home and out again," as it is called, in a sailing ship by the long sea route. Many persons, to

whom speed is not so much a consideration as comfort, prefer the quieter and more homelike routine in a well-ordered sailing ship to the more stylish and more exciting life in a large steamer.

A retired sea captain once said to me (I quote one of his own hyperbolical sentences), "I have never lost a rope yarn on any of my voyages." He was an enthusiastic advocate for sailing ships on temperance principles. Much as I respect the man and his principles of strict sobriety, I would not venture to print *all* his expressed views on the liquor question, lest I might be accused of being intemperate in my advocacy of the good cause of Temperance. Nor will I endorse what I have heard some other person boldly assert, namely, "that ninety per cent. of the mishaps at sea are caused by drunkenness." Such random statistics are not of much value; still I do believe that very many serious disasters might be traceable to that cause. It has been said, that "the best safety-valve for a steam boiler is a sober engineer;" and perhaps the best life-buoy on board a ship is a sober captain. Temperance reformers are not the only persons who recognise that fact, for I have heard men who were far from being temperate say, that they always felt safer in a ship if they knew the captain and officers to be strictly sober men. I can thoroughly endorse that sentiment.

The captain and the chief mate of the *Monarch* were teetotallers: still that did not wholly exempt the ship from perils and dangers of the voyage, though it undoubtedly helped to guard against injury from them. The ship was on one occasion hemmed in by icebergs. She got clear of them without damage; but had the officer of the watch or the man on the look-out been drunk on that perilous night, it is very likely that the

Monarch would have been in the list of "missing ships." On another occasion she was in imminent danger of colliding with a large screw steamer, which was gliding along like a snake in the grass, at full speed one dark night, when off the Brazilian coast. The vigilance and ready tact of the mate of the *Monarch* averted a collision, which might have been fatal to the crews of both ships. The *Monarch* was squared away just in time, and the steamer almost grazed alongside of her and passed on. The assumption was that the watch on deck were either asleep or drunk.

But there are other risks at sea besides those I have just glanced at, and more trickery on shipboard than is dreamt of by ordinary travellers, as the following incident will show. One evening, when the *Monarch* was nearing the Falkland Islands, Frank and Ben were walking the main-deck, chatting pleasantly about the fair progress they were making towards home. The weather was rather hazy, but the wind was fair, and the sea moderately smooth. Presently Frank stopped in his walk and looked so intently towards the fore part of the ship, that Ben, with some concern, asked him if he saw a vessel ahead?

"No, I don't see a vessel, Ben, but I fancy I can see a dead man. For the last half-hour I have been eyeing that look-out man on the fore-castle, and he hasn't moved half an inch. Let us go and see if he is frozen to death." Accordingly they went forward, and soon saw that it was a dummy man, or merely a sailor's oilskin coat and hat stuck on two hand-spikes, and rather cleverly fastened to the tack of the foresail, so as to represent a man keeping a careful look-out ahead for ships or ice-bergs. The officer of the watch could see the figure from his post on the quarter-deck, and was evidently

deceived by the trick. The man who should have been on the look-out was down in the fore-castle, playing at cards with his messmates.

"Well, that is the most reckless skulking I ever heard of," said Ben indignantly. "We might have run into an iceberg or another ship, and all hands have gone to the bottom of the sea, through that man's scandalous neglect of duty."

"That we might, Ben ; I have a good mind to report that fellow to the mate, for he deserves to be punished. I'll rouse him up on deck any way. I hate all that sort of rascality, whether afloat or on shore."

Frank then went below, and Ben could hear him talking to the skulking sailor in very plain language, and the man soon scrambled on deck to his duty.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“His eye, methinks, pursued the flight
Of birds to Britain, half way over,
With envy they could reach the white
Dear cliffs of Dover.”

—*Campbell.*

ON the ninety-sixth day after leaving Melbourne, the *Monarch* entered the English Channel, and a few days afterwards Frank and Ben landed at Blackwall. It had been previously arranged by them that they should take up their lodgings with Ben's grandmother, if she were living, as it might be a help to her, and be more comfortable and less expensive to them than stopping at an inn or a sailors' boarding-house; so they made their way direct to Hackney. When they got within sight of the old lady's house, Ben suggested that Frank had better go first and break the news to her of the return of her grandson, and he would wait at the corner of the street till Frank made a signal that he might safely show himself. In another minute or two Frank was standing inside the widow's little shop, which was very clean and tidy: the counter was still damp from recent scouring, and the floor was fresh sprinkled with red sand. The stock was a general assortment of groceries and sundries, of no great value in the aggregate, but it would have been evident at once to a practical observer

that it was a paying concern, because there was not a farthing's-worth of goods wasted for want of proper care. Frank wrapped on the counter with his knuckles, and presently an active old matron stepped from a back parlour and asked, "What do you please to want, sir?"

"Is your name Bruce, ma'am?"

"Yes, that is my name," replied the widow, and she began to tremble. She had no dread of bailiffs, or of those troublesome visitors called duns, but the question itself suggested that it was a stranger who had asked it, and a host of exciting thoughts rushed into her mind in a moment, upon subjects which she would gladly forget altogether, if it were possible.

"You have a grandson named Benjamin, I think, Mrs. Bruce?"

"Oh, dear me!" she exclaimed, and applied her white apron to her eyes. "I had a grandson, sir, but the poor boy is dead. He was drowned in the Thames nearly a year ago. Poor dear Ben! I never will believe that he jumped in purposely, whatever they may say. He was too thoughtful a boy to do such a terribly wicked act as that; it was an accident, I know. He was always a good boy, sir; and sorely enough I've missed him since he died."

"Who told you that he was dead, ma'am?"

"Oh, poor fellow! he was drowned, sure enough. I saw his dead body myself, and I have the newspaper with a full account of the inquest."

The sorrowful old lady was going back to her parlour for the newspaper to show to Frank, when he said, "Stay a minute, mother; don't run away. I have some news for you, but you mustn't get flurried over it. If I were to tell you that the verdict of the coroner's jury was a mistake, what would you say?"

"Ah, that can't be, sir. Listey, the tailor, swore he made poor Ben's corduroy jacket. Besides, all about the inquest is in the *Weekly News*. I'll show it to you if you'll wait a bit. I've got the paper safely put away in my desk."

"Never mind it, ma'am. I've known even weekly newspapers to make mistakes in their printing. Your grandson is alive and well."

"For pity's sake don't trifle with me, sir," said the widow imploringly. "My heart has been almost broken. I can't bear to be trifled with. My poor, dear Ben was the only being I had in the world to love me; and when I lost him, I seemed to have lost all desire for life."

"There, don't cry so hard, mother. If you can bear it I will let you see Ben in a day or two."

"Oh, my dear man, is it true?" she asked, as she seized one of Frank's hard hands. "Pray don't joke with me! I am a very infirm old woman, and it would be cruel to trifle with me—very cruel."

"Of course it would be, mother. Now go into your parlour and calm down a bit while I go and see if I can find Ben, and bring him to you at once, to show you that I am not joking. There, there, you must not get so flurried over it. You can't help crying? Well, I dare say you can't, mother—it's natural enough, and I don't want to stop you. It won't do you any harm, perhaps; but try if you can cry gently. You will soon break down altogether if you flurry your heart in this way. Ah, that's right, now; go inside and sit down, I will be back again very soon."

Frank then went outside the door and made a sign to Ben, and in a few minutes more he was locked in the fond embrace of his grandmother, who had for so many

dreary months mourned for him as dead. The excitement of the old lady was intense and varied. One moment she would laugh, and the next moment she would cry and hug her dear boy again, as if to satisfy herself that he was really in the body; then she would utter exclamations of extreme joy that her lost boy was brought back to life again. In the meanwhile the customers in her shop were wholly neglected, and some juvenile thieves of the neighbourhood seized the favourable opportunity for pilfering many little articles from her shop window. After awhile Frank left them, for the purpose, as he said, of taking a turn about the parts of London East that he was familiar with in his younger days; and when he was gone, grandmother, at Ben's suggestion, shut up her shop for the remainder of the day, and sat down with him to tell him all the interesting news she knew, and to hear from him some account of his adventures since he parted from her so suddenly—a day of sorrow never to be forgotten.

It appeared from her statement that about a week after his departure, and while every one was wondering what had become of him, a dead body was found floating in the Thames, off Wapping. Its features were wholly unrecognisable, but it corresponded in height and figure to Ben, and the clothes were similar to what he usually wore. The body had been too readily identified by some of the neighbours, who perhaps were influenced in their judgment by a sort of morbid feeling, which is not easily to be accounted for or to be defined. His grandmother had taken a hasty look at the corpse, and believed that it was her missing Ben because some of her neighbours had sworn to it. It was no marvel that she was deceived, for she was half blinded by her tears. It was generally believed that Ben had killed

himself for love of Jenny Timms, though Jenny's grief on that account was not noticeable to any one.

"But I am very much concerned, my dear," added Mrs. Bruce, as a wind-up to her lengthy story, "I am truly grieved that the dead body of a strange man, whom nobody knows, should be buried close beside your poor dear mother. And to think, too, that I should have had him put there so respectably, and that I should have been at the expense ever since of keeping his grave nicely trimmed and flowers on it! I am sorry indeed, and I must speak to the sexton about it to-morrow."

"Sorry, grandmother! Why, you ought to be very glad that I am not buried there, instead of the stranger."

"Yes, my dear, so I am glad—very glad; but I am sorry too, if you can understand me. I am grieved to think that a fellow, of whose history we know actually nothing at all, should be lying near your dear mother's remains, in her own ground, which I paid for—that's what I mean. I have no idea who the man is."

"Never fret about that, grandmother. I don't believe it will matter in the least degree who is buried beside her. You have many times told me that my poor mother was a good woman."

"Yes, my dear, she certainly was a good woman; though many persons looked down on her for one sad fault she was lured into. Her sin brought years of sorrow to her and to me also; but she truly repented of it, and she died in peace, trusting in Christ for pardon and salvation, so I am sure she has got safe to heaven."

"If so, she is happy enough now, and we need not be troubled about her. If I were as well prepared for death as she was, I would not fret if I knew that my poor dead body would be buried at sea, or on a battle-

field. But I say, grandmother, I wish you would tell me a little of my mother's history, and the name and occupation of my father," added Ben entreatingly. You know I have often expressed a wish to know all particulars, and you are the only one I can question on the subject. I do not think you can have any good reason for not telling me what I so much wish to know. I am not a child now, grandmother, and I can understand all you say to me. I can't conceive why you make such a mystery of my origin."

The old lady sighed as she replied, "I have no reason for not telling you all you want to know, my dear, except that it is a very painful subject for me to touch upon; and it cannot do you any good to know of your father's profligacy and your mother's lifelong suffering."

"I should much like to know all you can tell me about them both. It is a natural wish, grandmother, and if you still refuse to gratify it, I shall be sorely grieved."

"I would not grieve you again for all the world, my boy. No, no; I have suffered too much for grieving you before. You shall hear all about your dear mother and your cruel father; but it is a long, sad story, Ben—a very sad story."

"Well, you shall not begin to tell it now," said Ben, and he kissed his grandmother fondly. "You have had too much excitement to-day already; besides, my friend Mr. Shorter will be back presently. Some other time, when we can sit down here by ourselves without fear of being disturbed, you shall tell me about it. Now let me know all the pleasant news of the neighbourhood," he added, by way of changing her thoughts from the painful subject. "How is my pretty little sweetheart, Jenny? Ha, ha! what a mistake the folks made who said I drowned myself for love!"

"Humph! sweetheart indeed! She ran away with a soldier eight months ago, and her mother is half-crazy about her."

"Then it is lucky for me that I ran away as a sailor," said Ben, smiling. "If I had stopped at home and married Jenny, I should have made a bad bargain, I fear, the worst bad bargain a young fellow can make in life."

"Indeed you would, my dear! You would have had a dolly for a wife, and not a dumb dolly either. She *could* talk, and there wasn't much common-sense in her head to guide her tongue, that's why I disliked to hear her. I knew what she was, Ben, though you never would hear a word I had to say against her; and I declare to you that the only thing which seemed to console me, when I was mourning for your death, was the idea that you were spared from the misery of being the husband of that silly, heartless girl. Oh, dear me! that would have been a trial to me!"

"It certainly was a fortunate escape for me, grandmother. But it was also lucky for me that I fell in love with Jenny; for my doing so made you fidgety with me, and made me dissatisfied with my home. It was very wrong of me to run away from you as I did, and cause you so much anxiety; but I was punished for it by the remorse I felt for my rashness. After all, you see it has turned out a good thing for me. I have escaped being tied for life to a troublesome wife, and I have had a cruise round the world, which has taught me more of men and manners than I should have learnt in twenty years in my old workshop, and I have come back to you safe and sound, with a few pounds in my pocket to share with you."

"Deary, deary me! it does seem truly marvellous! I can hardly realize it," said the widow, and she gave

Ben another loving hug. "To think that you have been actually all round the wide world, and over the great and mighty sea, and here you are again, strong and lively, and none the worse for all the ups and downs that you have seen! wonderful! But only fancy, my love, that I should so often have sat weeping on that strange man's grave on Sunday afternoons! Ah, you may laugh, Ben, but it's a solemn thing to me."

"Beg your pardon, grandmother; I won't laugh again."

"No, don't, dear! The three and threepence I paid for flower roots and a Christmas-box to the sexton will be all a loss, I suppose, but it's only fair that I should get back the burial fees and the——hey, save us! What's that noise?"

"Don't be frightened, grandmother; it's only some noisy tinker hammering at the shop door."

"Oh, my! how that boy did make me jump, to be sure! His tin mug jangles like a fire-bell."

"He is an impatient customer, whoever he is. I hope he doesn't come very often?" said Ben.

"It's poor little Joey Finch, I know him by his mug. Excuse me a minute, Ben. I must go and open the door, or he'll stop there rapping till midnight." Away trotted the old lady into her shop. Presently she came back and sat down again in her easy-chair. "I wouldn't have opened the door to serve any other customer with a ha'porth of treacle, but I always pity that poor child, because all the people in the neighbourhood seem to be against him."

"Who is Joey Finch, grandmother?"

"Oh, you don't know him, dear. His mother came to live at No. 40 soon after you went away. Everybody says the poor child is silly, and he hasn't a friend in the street; but I verily believe he has more honesty,

if he has less cunning sense, than the folks have who are always thumping or teasing him ; and he has a kind, affectionate heart, which is more than any of his enemies have got. It is cruelly strange that an inoffensive, forlorn creature, who is deserving of pity and sympathy, should get nothing but hard usage ; but I believe the Lord keeps a special watch and guard over such poor helpless ones."

"I believe it too, grandmother ; and any one who persecutes them will sooner or later be punished for it. When Joey comes to the shop again, give him this sixpence ; but you needn't say it came from me."

"Thankee, Ben. He will be pleased, sure enough ! I have taken notice of little Joey since you left, and he has naturally got fond of me—love begets love, you know, Ben. To tell you the truth, if you hadn't come back, I meant to have left all my goods and chattels to the Rector, in trust for the poor boy. But what was I going to say when Joey tapped at the door with his tin pot and startled me so much ?"

"I think it was my turn to speak then, grandmother," replied Ben, who did not want to hear any more of her lamentations over the strange man in his mother's grave. "I was going to say—but I'm afraid you will be vexed with me——"

"No, dear, I shall not. You won't say anything to hurt my feelings, I'm sure. I always like you to speak out your mind."

"Well, I was about to say that I wonder you have not found some one to love, bigger than little Joey Finch—to speak more plainly, that you have not got married again, grandmother, to some nice, comfortable old man."

"Mercy 'pon us, laddie ! How can you think of such nonsense ? Well, I never heard the like in this house !

Married, indeed! Oh dear me! never mention such a thing again, there's a good boy! Many, many times have I said to myself, when sitting warming my night-cap by the fire, in cold winter weather, Oh how glad and thankful I am that I haven't a coughing old man to fidget me, as poor Mrs. Betts next door has."

"Why, grandmother!" exclaimed Ben, with feigned seriousness, "haven't I often and often heard you speak most lovingly of dear grandfather, and lament that he was dead and gone?"

"Ah, that you have, dear, and so you will again, perhaps; but that's another matter altogether. Yes, yes, my own dear old man, who was my young man once—of course I wish I had him, poor darling! He wouldn't fidget me if he were always coughing—not he, indeed! And it would be a happiness to me to nurse and comfort him. I thought you meant a new old man, Ben; that's what made me speak up so sharply. I beg your pardon, dear."

Soon afterwards, Frank came back after his long ramble about the East End of London, and while they were having tea he highly amused Ben and Mrs. Bruce with his quaint remarks on the changes he had noticed in the haunts of his early roystering days. Near the site of the Blue Anchor tap, where he first saw his fickle sweetheart, Maggie Deap, a seamen's chapel was erected; and a gin-palace, almost as gorgeous as a Chinese joss-house, had replaced the old tavern, Jolly Sailor, at Wapping, where he had often paid out his hard earnings for the fun of a night's mad revelry, and the misery of a headache the next morning. He said he had tried to find the slop-seller who thirty years ago sold him a monkey-jacket made of shoddy cloth, and it blew to pieces before the voyage was half-way through, and

caused him many a cold shiver. But the slop-shop was turned into a coal and potato warehouse, with a fresh tenant.

"I hardly expected to find the rogue with his trade flourishing after so many years," added Frank. "If I had come across him, I meant to have told him of his cruel cheater; but perhaps he has been reminded of it in another place before this. It is my belief that rogues who sell shoddy clothing to poor sailors and other hard-working men, will come in for much the same sort of punishment, by-and-by, that grudging shipowners will get who send old worm-eaten crafts to sea badly found in standing and running gear and sails, and with unwholesome provisions in the store-room."

"Ah! that is shocking wickedness!" said grandmother warmly. There is a lot of cheater in trade now-a-days, as I sometimes find out to my cost in my small way of dealing—adulteration, short weights, false labels, and other dishonest tricks, but to put bad provisions on board ship for the use of poor sailors, who have no chance to help themselves to better fare when far at sea, is the most shamefaced roguery the world ever saw; and I am horrified to think that British shipowners would ever do such things. It is as bad as slow poisoning."

"I wish everybody hated cheater as much as you do, grandmother," said Ben; and then by way of changing the subject, as he saw the dear old lady was getting excited again, he asked Frank if he was a native of London East, as he seemed to be so familiar with its noisy streets and alleys.

"No, Ben, I'm not a cockney. I was born in one of the prettiest green lanes that can be found in Buckinghamshire; but I used to know rather too much about

the back slums of Wapping and Limehouse after I became a sailor. When I came off a voyage I spent much of my time thereabouts, while my money lasted. My father used to work in a water-mill, near Leighton Buzzard, and so soon as I was able to yell loud enough to scare rooks off the corn-fields, I was hired for that game by Farmer Gibbs, at a shilling a week. After I grew bigger I went to work in the flour-mill with father, for a year or two. It was in a real pretty valley, sure enough! The birds used to flit among the trees that grew by the mill-stream, and sing away all day long to the music of the water sparkling over the dam. I think I got my longing for a life on the water when paddling about on that mill-pond in a tub. Those were the happiest days of my life; and perhaps it's a pity I did not think so then, and stop in my native village. But boys aren't always wise—any more than full-grown men are."

"How did you come to leave your native village, Frank?"

"I don't mind telling you, Ben; but I daresay grandmother would sooner hear you talk to-night—it's natural enough that she should. My yarn won't interest her much, and she mightn't like to hear it at all."

Grandmother and Ben each declared that they would much like to hear Frank's story; so, thus encouraged, he began:

"As I said before, I used to work in the mill with my father, and we had a good master. Our wages were low, but most working men have low wages in this country. Master said I wasn't a bad boy to work, and I wasn't what you may call a real vicious fellow, though I say it myself. I was fond of snaring hares and rabbits, and I could handle a gun pretty well. I

had never got caught at my poaching tricks, so I grew over bold, and, boy-like, I didn't see much harm in having a bit of sport now and then. One evening young Gibbs, the farmer's son, coaxed me to go with him to see if we could catch a hare or two on his uncle's farm. He had a net, which he fastened over the gate of a field of barley, and told me to watch outside for the hare, as it would be sure to run for the gate. I knew what to do, for I had often done it before; so I said, 'All right, Ned,' and away he went round the field with his dog to rouse the hare up. I hadn't been waiting above ten minutes when I heard something coming along full tear. Of course I thought it was a hare, and a big one too, by the noise he made. Presently it galloped into the net, and I fell upon it to keep it from getting away again, when, oh, Jeremy! didn't my heart jump! It was an old badger, and it nipped hold of my thigh like a mad dog. My wig, Ben, how I did roar! I was scared, you may depend, and I shouted for Ned Gibbs with all my might; but he had scudded off over hedges and ditches and away home by the shortest cut, for he thought the gamekeeper had caught me, and he didn't want to be caught himself. That's the way of the world again, Ben: scrubby fellows who will tempt you into wrongdoing are the very first to desert you if you get into trouble over it, as you are pretty sure to do.

"In struggling to escape I got twisted up in the net—a regular tangle, so that neither I nor the badger could get out again; and there I lay and roared, and the brute scratched and gnawed at me till I was pretty nigh half dead with pain and fright. After a while, who should come racing up but old Coleman, the gamekeeper—the very man I didn't want to see. 'Yah! stop your yelling, you young reptile,' grumbled the keeper; and he

tried to catch hold of me, in the dark, but he took hold of the badger, and it grabbed him by the wrist. Oh dear, how the old fellow did rave for a minute or two! When he had shaken me out of the net, he said, 'Oho! Frank Shorter, is it? Got you at last, have I? I've been hunting for you many a night. There's the treadmill for you, you vagabond! Come on! no good of your yelling now.'

"He held me fast by the collar and dragged me off to the village cage. My father didn't know where I was till next morning, and then he managed to bail me out. But I was afraid to stop to go before the justice, for I knew I should be severely punished, and I was ashamed to face my neighbours in the village, to be laughed and jeered at, and perhaps be nicknamed 'Badger'; so I ran off to London, and I never heard that any one ran after me, which is a sign that I wasn't much wanted. It would be too long a story to tell you to-night all the troubles I went through before I could get any one to take me as a sailor-boy; but at last I got a ship, and I have been a wandering sailor ever since. That is a little of my early history, Ben. No, no, my boy, don't beg my pardon: you won't offend me by laughing at my disaster, never fear; and it will serve me right if you blame me too. But I am going to say, before I stop talking, you see what a simple affair will sometimes alter the whole course of a man's life-career. Perhaps if it had not been for that savage badger jumping into the net instead of a hare, I should have stopped quietly in my native village, and have been a miller's man to this day, without having seen a wider sheet of water than my master's mill-pond. Likely enough I should have married Tilly Yates, the thatcher's daughter, and might have been a happy grandfather by this time, instead of being

an old roving, reckless sailor, without a home or habitation to call my own, or a soul in the world that cares a copper for me, except it be yourself, Ben, and your dear old grandmother here."

CHAPTER XIX.

“Be thou as chaste as ice, and pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny.”

—*Shakespeare.*

MRS. BRUCE willingly agreed to Ben's proposal, that he and Frank should lodge with her for awhile. By a little good management and the purchase of a few extra articles of furniture, they were each accommodated with a room, and were well pleased with their comfortable quarters. Their evenings were usually spent in the widow's little back parlour; and she was never weary of hearing Frank's exciting tales of the sea. She said that she should henceforward like sailors, as a class, though she had felt a strong prejudice against them ever since the foggy night, years ago, when two bargemen sneaked into her shop and stole her whole stock of cut tobacco, and three Dutch cheeses.

Frank had made good progress in navigation under the tuition of Mr. Wallace. He mastered all the intricacies of plain sailing, and could take the sun's meridian altitude for latitude, or a morning's altitude for longitude. He had also learned a little of trigonometry; but he wanted to know more of it, and there were other things essential for him to know, before he could pass an examination, which Mr. Wallace had not time, and perhaps not skill enough, to teach him. Frank soon made the acquaintance of a sea captain, who lived

near to Mrs. Bruce. He had commanded a ship in the Quebec trade; but when returning home on his last voyage, timber laden, and with a heavy deck-load, he fell in with bad weather and his ship capsized. He was for several days clinging to the wreck and endured great suffering, and five of his crew were frozen to death. The survivors were rescued and brought to London by one of the mail packets. But the captain was so crippled, by long exposure to cold and wet, that he was unfit for sea service; and having no reserve fund of his own to draw upon, he was reduced to great straits, and had hard work—as he expressed it—to claw off the bleak lee-shore of destitution. He was willing, for a moderate consideration, to teach Frank all he wanted to know to pass a second mate's examination; so he paid daily visits to the house of his tutor with strict punctuality. His tasks appeared formidable at first, but by steady efforts he mastered them, and would often wonder at the simplicity of a thing, which he had fancied was altogether too hard for his weak head; and he owned that the knottiest problem or the most puzzling rule he mastered in any of his books on navigation, was, after all, much easier work than reefing a foresail in a gale of wind, or rigging out a jury bowsprit.

The news of Ben's return home soon spread through the immediate neighbourhood, and caused almost as much excitement as the "Cock-lane Ghost," of ancient memory. Those persons who had sworn to his identity, at the coroner's inquest on the dead body before alluded to, were obliged to admit that they were wrong, but they tried to cover their mistake by the old cry of puzzled *savans*, "That there was some mystery in the affair which they could not fathom." Ben's genteel attire gained him a form of respect from his old

acquaintances, for he was supposed to have made money on his travels. The encouraging smirks of Miss Fox, the dressmaker, were properly estimated by him, for he remembered that she had never deigned to notice him when he wore a workman's corduroy suit. Some of his former shopmates were anxious to know how he had managed to make a fortune in twelve months, and all of them seemed willing to start off to the antipodes if they could insure similar success. It is but fair to Ben to state that he did not do or say anything to encourage the general belief that he was rich: he never spoke of his affairs outside of his grandmother's house, and his reputed wealth was merely the coinage of his poor neighbours' fancies. It was simply enough imagined, in those days, that all returned colonists from Australia were laden with gold, like busy bees with yellow wax.

The excitement of the public mind in Back Street was for a time favourable to Mrs. Bruce's trade, and the influx of customers to her shop was more than her failing strength could manage, so she was obliged to have a girl to help her. Every fresh customer asked kindly after her grandson, and the old lady felt quite proud to think that Ben had so many loving friends. But it was soon plain enough to him that there was not much solidity in all that outward show of respect, and that he was expected to pay for it, either in coin or in some fraternal manifestation. He was polite as usual to all his old neighbours, but he had no desire for a closer intimacy with them; indeed, he had not time to spare for friendly intercourse with them all, had he desired it. His reserved bearing soon nettled the pride of some of the folks, and stirred up envy and jealousy and other uncharitable feelings, and he was subjected to much petty annoyance which at times sorely tried his patience.

To be recognised in a community as a poor man is not always grateful to one's feelings; and to be esteemed a rich man while you know yourself to be in straitened circumstances, perhaps financially embarrassed, is, to say the least, a very doubtful advantage. To answer the numerous applicants for aid to charitable objects with reluctant excuses, and to witness incredulous shrugs when you explain "that you really cannot afford it just now," is misery to an honest, liberal heart, which can only be fully understood by those who have experienced it. Ben Bruce's reputed wealth was more embarrassing to him than the worst phases of poverty he had known. Many of his indigent neighbours stopped him in the streets with their tales of woe, and humbly begged him to help them for old acquaintance sake; and some of his former shopmates asked for the loan of a little cash, to redeem tools and chattels which they were obliged to pawn last winter, when work was so slack. Ben candidly told each applicant that he had no money to spare; but some only shook their heads mournfully and renewed their entreaties for help, which plainly showed that they did not believe him, while others pettishly called him hard names, and walked away offended. If Ben had told them the plain fact, that all the cash he owned when he landed in England was twenty-two pounds, it would not have helped him to stave off his poverty-stricken shopmates, for they would most likely have continued to crave money from him, until they were sure he had not a single coin left. Such greedy beggars are never satisfied.

After he had lived on shore a week, he prudently began to consider what he had better turn his attention to for a livelihood. His own trade of hat-box maker was still very dull, and many hands were out of work.

Moreover, he had seen enough of life in the Australian colonies to create a distaste in his mind for the hard work and small pay of a London factory hand, so he had no serious thoughts of turning to that work again, and what else to turn to he could not decide, though he spent several days and nights cogitating the subject. His kind old grandmother proposed that he should stay with her, and add a greengrocery department to her shop, with a coal and wood yard at the back ; but Ben urged that he did not understand the greengrocery trade, and that there were already three coal and wood dealers in the street ; furthermore, he said, he could not carry on that business without a donkey and cart, and he did not know how to drive. He might have added, that he was not willing to learn to drive a donkey in London streets.

"Take things coolly, mate," said Frank, when Ben appealed to him for advice in his perplexity. "You could never take a good altitude of the sun if you didn't keep your sextant steady. Ah, you may smile at my show of science, Ben, but it's a fact, and the principle of the thing can be applied as far as you like. I have seen a lot of scared passengers on board ship clap on to a clewline in a squall, and pull and tug away like mad fellows, but the sail aloft might flap into shreds before they could snug it up, because they were too flurried to pull together. They only exhausted their strength for nothing. But if half the number of able seamen were to go at the clewline, with a strong steady pull altogether, the sail would be hauled up all snug in no time. Now just take that hint, Ben, and don't waste your spirits in worry and flurry, and depend on it you will make more headway whatever you go at. You haven't been on shore much over a week, and have

hardly had time to tell all your travelling news to your grandmother. Take it easy a bit longer, messmate, and we shall see what luck will turn up before our money bags are emptied. Oh, the donkey be blowed! Don't say any more to me about it. I won't agree to your driving a costermonger's cart: you had better go to sea again as cook's mate than do that. But cheer up, Ben! If I pass my examination for a second mate's certificate as I hope to do, I'll make a snug opening for you, never fear."

"You are very kind, Frank; and your advice is always worth attending to. I have a notion that before I settle down to real work I ought to take a trip into Durham, and deliver Dumby's Bible to his mother, if I can find her. The thing is always on my mind, and I'd like to do it, though I cannot well afford the expense. What do you think?"

"Why I think you ought to do it, to be sure, Ben. I forgot about that job, and it is one of the identical things that you came to England for. Go and find out Dumby's mother by all means, poor old soul! She will be glad to see you, no doubt. I wouldn't mind going with you, but I must stick to my lessons. My tutor is anxious to turn me out shipshape, and is taking extra pains with me, so I must keep hard at it, though I sometimes think this old head of mine will crack with being crammed too full of knowledge. If I ever have any money to spare, Ben, I'll do for that poor frost-bitten skipper what his rich owner ought to have done for him long ago—I'll pension him for life. Any way, I'll take care that he doesn't have an empty 'bacca box for some months to come."

Ben was aware of his grandmother's weakness for chatting across her counter, and he had heard some of

the incidents of his travels related to her gossiping customers, so he was careful not to tell her anything that he was not willing for her to make public, lest in her desire to magnify him she should incautiously let it out. She had no idea that anything save pure love for her had induced Ben to return to England ; and as it would not have comforted her to lose that impression, he never spoke of his mission to Dumby's relatives. The old lady was somewhat anxious to know why he wished to go to Durham ; but as he did not seem willing to tell her, she did not press her inquiries. She was very careful to avoid vexing him in any way, lest he should run away again.

I have before stated, that Ben had a good-looking face, and a fine manly figure ; and although he had not moved in refined society, he had a natural dignity of manner which some men of more cultured minds do not possess. He was obliged to tolerate coarseness and vulgarity occasionally in the persons he had been thrown in contact with, in the workshop and on board ship, but in his heart he loathed it. The society of Mr. Wallace on board the *Monarch* was very agreeable to him, and he learnt much from that young gentleman's polite deportment which strangely contrasted with the noisy behaviour of his brother midshipmen. Frank, though unpolished in his address, had more delicacy of feeling than the generality of men of his class. He used to say that he picked up his good manners when he was doctor's man in the navy. Ben had never heard Frank utter an oath, or even hint at anything that was obscene or unchaste ; indeed, he always showed his disgust if any of his shipmates indulged their propensities in that way, and on that account Ben was disposed to look lightly at some defects in Frank's character and temper. Ben's

studies on board ship tended to expand his mind (which had not received much culture), and to create a desire for more useful knowledge, which he longed for opportunities of acquiring. Hence, it will be judged, that he did not find the society of Back Street congenial to his taste, and he always felt more dignified and manlike when he was away from that locality. "A prophet is not without honour," etc.

When he was leaving his home on Monday morning, his grandmother remarked, with affectionate pride, that he looked quite a gentleman. If Ben felt comforted by the compliment, he was not allowed to enjoy the nice feeling long, for as he passed down the street on his way to the station, with a small travelling bag under his arm, he was an object of attraction to the staring neighbours, one of whom jeeringly commented on his superfine clothes, and asked if he had paid his tailor. Ben passed on without apparently hearing the rude remarks; and he reflected that in all his travels round the world, and amid the crowds of strangers in Sydney and Melbourne, his feelings were not subjected to so much mortification as they had been for the few days since he returned to his childhood's home. When he moved out of his native street he felt his confidence gradually returning, and soon afterwards he was rolling along on the Great Northern Railway, amongst delightful upland and woodland scenery, and feeling that he was a man, though some of his old neighbours would try to make him fancy he was still the boy Ben, Mr. Chippet's pauper apprentice, and that it was presumptuous for him to hold his head up straight.

The change from a sort of cooped-up existence in crowded London to the life-blessing liberty of the country, with its wholesome air and freshness and beauty, can

only be appreciated by those who have experienced its inspiriting influence. As I now sit at my desk in a rural retreat at the antipodes, I have keen recollections of several winters lately spent in England, and which, after forty years' residence in sunny Australia, most severely tried my semi-tropical constitution. Especially do I remember the very cold winter of 1880; I shall never forget it. Mainly for the sake of getting into a warmer locality, I left my country home (very pleasant in summer, but bleak in winter), and took apartments for six months in one of the southern suburbs of London. I was pretty well occupied with literary work, which I could do by the fireside, and I was not obliged to go out of doors, though I liked to go out as often as practicable, for the sake of fresh air and exercise, and I was sometimes curious to know how London looked when its streets and housetops were covered with snow and icicles.

Well do I remember how gladly I hailed the brief intervals of slanting sunshine in early spring! How I used to muffle up like a North Sea pilot, and ramble through some of the lanes of Dulwich and Norwood, to see if the rooks had begun to build in the tall elm-trees, or to try if I could find a solitary hawthorn bud opening into leaf. How longingly I wished the flowery month of May to come, when my London tenancy was to cease, and I hoped to return to the country for a holiday rest. And when the long sighed for day of departure arrived, and I packed up my baggage and started by train for my rural home, and the society of valued friends again, my heart bounded with a sort of school-boy's hilarity, or with the kicking gladness of a released cab-horse.

A traveller on the Great Eastern Railway can hardly

fail to notice the dismal prospect of tiled roofs, smoking chimney-pots, and the back-yards of numberless uncomfortable-looking tenements, for a mile or two after the train leaves the Liverpool-street station ; but when the engine begins to puff along at an increased speed, and the green fields and woods and brooks come in sight, what a blessed relief he feels in his heart and lungs and spirits ! He has left noisy, smoky London, behind, and feels as if he does not want to see it again in a hurry—or that is just how I felt as I sped down in an express train, one bright day at the end of May, after the exceptionally cold winter before alluded to. The snow and icicles and cold shiverings were all forgotten in the present enjoyment of spring warmth and holiday elasticity of spirits. How exhilarating it was to sit by the carriage window and see the old village churches, and farmhouses, and stackyards, and windmills, as they seemed to rush past us at the lively rate of forty miles an hour ! The blossoming trees and hedgerows, and green cornfields, and meadows with sleek-looking cattle and frisky sheep, nearly up to their knees in grass and buttercups—all added to the pleasing variety of the moving panorama. The little red-faced village children, who shouted hurrah ! at the rushing train, looked bright as angels compared with some of the poor sickly children of the crowded parts of the great city.

When I got to my quiet home again (in one of the most picturesque parts of Essex), I fancied that all the spring daisies on the lawn seemed to smile at me, while the sweetbrier and blossoming hawthorn trees, and the honeysuckle in the hedges, almost overpowered me with fragrance. The graceful laburnums and the tall chestnut-trees in the background, had put on their best flowery garbs to cheer me up. Even the big holly-trees tried to

look springy—they had shaken off all their old red berries, or the birds had eaten them, and were covered with white blossoms, which promised a crop of red clustering berries when Christmas came round again. The wild flowers under the hedges too were all alive, and seemed to say to me, in their homely way, “Here we are again, master : we know you love to see us, though we aren’t so grand as garden flowers. Welcome home ! welcome home !” Oh how glad I was to be at rest again—for a while !

Dear old England ! How much I wish that every one of your sons loved you as well as I do ; and that they could all honestly join me in saying, “God save our gracious Queen !” In the present agitation for fresh annexation of territory, I sometimes feel concerned lest the latter part of the following stanza of the late poet, James Montgomery, should be realized—which Heaven forbid :—

“O Britain ! dear Britain ! the land of my birth !

O Isle most enchantingly fair !

Thou pearl of the ocean, thou gem of the earth,

O my mother ! my mother ! beware !

For wealth is a phantom, and empire a snare :

O let not thy birthright be sold

For reprobate glory and gold :

Thy distant dominions like wild graftings shoot,

They weigh down thy trunk—they will tear up thy root.”

Tender recollections of home life have tempted me to digress from my story, for which I beg pardon.

Ben Bruce vastly enjoyed his long ride through several beautiful counties of England, and it was a treat for him such as he had never had before. On his arrival at the old town of S—— he went to the Red Lion Inn, and engaged a bed for the night. While he was partaking

of a homely meal, which the landlady herself placed on the table for him in a little back room, he made a few inquiries about the family he was in quest of; and learned that the Marshalls lived at Newby Hall, a few miles off, and that a coach ran past the lodge gate three times a day. He further learnt that Mr. Marshall senior had been dead about a year, and that his only son, Henry, had been expected home to take possession of the estate; but news had lately arrived from Melbourne that he was dead. Old Mrs. Marshall and her granddaughter were living at the Hall, but their late troubles had affected them so sorely that they seldom went out of the house, and they never saw any visitors. The landlady also told Ben that if he had any particular business with Mrs. Marshall, he would have to do it through Mr. Mead, the steward of the estate, who lived about a mile off; but he would very likely call at the inn to-morrow on his way to the Hall, as he usually did. The landlady looked as if she would like to know what Ben's business was with Mrs. Marshall; but he was reticent on the subject, and resolved to go to Newby Hall the next day, without any previous application to the steward.

CHAPTER XX.

“Dare to be true : nothing can need a lie ;
A fault that needs it must grow two thereby.”

—*G. Herbert.*

BEN was longer at his toilet the next morning than usual, and he spent nearly half an hour in wriggling his fingers into a pair of new kid-gloves. I have before stated that he was tidy in his personal habits, so it will be inferred that he rightly estimated the usefulness of brushes in his toilet operations, and of course his finger-nails were in a sightly condition. After breakfast, he took another look at himself in the glass, to be sure that he was fit to appear before grand folks ; then he worked his kid-gloves on to his hands again—they fitted him easier than at the first trial—and he was ready for the arrival of the stage-coach which was to take him to Newby Hall. While he was waiting, the landlady again tried to learn his errand, but without success.

About an hour afterwards, Ben was put down at the lodge gate. As he walked up a long avenue of oak-trees towards the mansion, the death scene of Dumby in the forecastle of the *Wolf* vividly recurred to his mind, and he reflected with sorrow on the miserable end of the man who might have been in possession of that fine estate and an income sufficient for a modest prince. The main part of the house was large and antique in its style of architecture. A wing of more ornate design

was in course of erection at the northern end ; but the work had apparently been stopped suddenly, for, though all the plant and building materials were on the spot, not a single workman was to be seen, and the closed venetian blinds to every window of the house, with the deathlike stillness all around, cast an air of gloominess over the whole homestead, which contrasted strangely with the beauties of the surrounding landscape. Ben walked up to the front door and pulled the bell-handle very gently. He was beginning to doubt if the bell had tinkled, when the door was noiselessly opened by a footman in mourning livery, who, in reply to Ben's request to see Mrs. Marshall, said that his mistress could not see visitors ; but he might see Mr. Mead if he wished.

"Will you please to tell Mrs. Marshall that I have lately come from Australia, and that I have a book to deliver to her from her deceased son? You can also say, that if she does not wish to see me, I will leave the book with you, and I shall return to London by this evening's train."

"Oh, will you please to walk in, sir? I think Mrs. Marshall will wish to see you, as you knew her late son in Australia," said the man, with an altered expression ; and he led Ben into a large room, which looked even more gloomy than the outside of the house, for all the curtains were closely drawn down. After awhile his eyes became accustomed to the dingy light, and he began to examine the pictures on the walls. They were a collection of family portraits, and Ben was struck with the close likeness which some of them bore to his late unlucky shipmate. Before he had looked at half of the pictures, the door was opened, and an elderly lady entered the room, with a slow and feeble gait. Ben

advanced a step or two towards her, and made a polite bow.

"Pray, what is your name?" she asked. At the same time she gazed at Ben so strangely that he fancied she was not quite sane, and he was sorry he had allowed the servant to call her.

"My name is Benjamin Bruce, madam."

"Bruce!" muttered the lady, with an abstracted air. "Did I rightly understand my servant that you have lately come from Australia?"

"Yes, ma'am, I sailed from Melbourne, and landed in England about ten days ago."

"Is Australia your home? Were you born there?"

"Y—yes, ma'am," replied Ben, blushing deeply: for he felt conscious that he told an untruth. Mrs. Marshall's unexpected question caused a rush of dread into his mind, lest he should betray his unhappy origin, and the lie slipped from his tongue almost involuntarily. But the next moment conscience reminded him that he had sacrificed principle to pride, and he was grieved. To retract the lie at once was his first impulse. "But if I do so, I shall show myself to be untruthful, and the lady will naturally suspect my whole story. It must stand as it is for the present." Thus he mentally reasoned with conscience, while he strove to hide his trepidation.

Mrs. Marshall sat for several minutes gazing at him, with such a peculiar expression in her eyes, that he began again to doubt her sanity. Presently she asked, with a tender earnestness that touched all the sympathies of Ben's heart: "You knew my unfortunate son, my darling Harry! Pray tell me all you know of him. Would to God he had closed his eyes in death when he was an infant! What bitter anguish it would have saved my poor heart!"

Her voice became stifled by emotion, and she was unable to articulate another word. It was a touching scene, and Ben could not help shedding tears. As her paroxysm of grief subsided, he noticed her lips moving as if in silent prayer. At her request he presently related the particulars of her son's death, as given in my fifth chapter. She listened with her head bowed to her breast, as if overburdened with hopeless sorrow. But when Ben told of the dying man's last words, "Good Lord, have mercy upon me!" she suddenly lifted her head, and exclaimed with startling energy :

"Oh tell me that again, good sir ! Thank God for the ray of hope which that sentence gives me ! It is written, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' I *will* therefore believe that in the eleventh hour—nay, in the very last minute of his life, my prayers for my wayward, prodigal son have been answered, and that he is saved." She then seized Ben's hands and exclaimed with rapture : "Oh how thankful I am to you, dear sir, for coming to me with these comforting tidings. This is indeed a happy morning for me ! Ever since I received the melancholy news of my dear Harry's death, and the papers which contained his own harrowing account of his profligate career, I have been almost overwhelmed by despair, for I feared he was lost to me for ever. But now my heart is wonderfully lifted up. I know that not one of God's promises shall fail. 'He is faithful who hath promised.' Yes," she ejaculated, with upturned face, which seemed radiant with hope and gratitude, "My precious boy called on the name of the Lord with his last breath, and he is saved. I will believe it." Then, turning again towards Ben, she said, in a tone of affectionate entreaty : "But oh, my dear young gentleman, let me solemnly warn you not to risk

your eternal fate upon the precarious chance of being saved in your last hour, for many wretched sinners have been snatched away by sudden death, without even a minute's warning to call upon the name of the Lord. That gracious promise is perhaps given to assuage such hopeless grief as I have lately been suffering—to save poor bereaved parents from despair; but it would be dangerous presumption for any one to defer his repentance to the last moment of his life in reliance on that promise."

Ben did not know what to say to Mrs. Marshall's touching exhortation, so he made no reply, but took from his pocket her son's Bible, and handed it to her, whereupon her grief broke out afresh, and she sobbed hysterically, as she clasped the book to her bosom. At that moment a young lady, also dressed in deep mourning, entered the room. On seeing the mental distress of Mrs. Marshall, she rushed towards her, and in her excitement did not notice Ben, although he was noticing her with almost reverential feelings.

"Oh my dear grandma! Why did you not call me?" she exclaimed, as she threw her arms affectionately around the old lady's neck. "Tell me, dear grandma, what is the matter?"

"I am better now, my love. Pray don't distress yourself, for I am really more joyous than sad. You shall hear the comforting news this young gentleman has brought us of your unfortunate father." The young lady then arose and bowed respectfully to Ben, who returned her bow with all the grace he was master of. But he did not feel at ease in her company, for he fancied she could see that his polite deportment was merely put on. In order to relieve his own embarrassment, and also to give the ladies an opportunity of

conversing together, he asked permission to walk round the grounds for a little while, which they willingly granted. Their offer to send a servant with him he bashfully declined.

Ben had told the driver of the stage-coach to sound his horn at the lodge on his return trip to the city ; so about ten minutes before the time he expected the coach, he went back to the mansion and explained to Mrs. Marshall that he was about to depart.

"Oh, my dear sir, let me beg of you not to go away so soon!" said Mrs. Marshall, whose manner had now become calm and collected. "I had no idea that you were in such haste. There is so much that I wish to ask you, and I have much to say in thankfulness to you for your great kindness in coming all the way from London to bring joy and gladness to my home. Do pray stay till to-morrow ! I must ask you to pardon me, Mr. Bruce," she added, as if suddenly recollecting her omission. "I quite forgot to introduce my granddaughter to you. This is Miss Edith Marshall, Mr. Bruce."

The young lady stepped gracefully towards him and offered her hand, and said she hoped he would stay awhile with them, as her grandmamma so much wished to talk with him. Ben blushed, and felt again his awkwardness in making a suitable reply ; but modesty is a good guide on such occasions, and Miss Marshall was perhaps better pleased with the few words he said than she would have been if he had been over talkative. Presently dinner was announced, and though Ben would rather have gone off without a meal than stay and dine in such a grand house, he was constrained to follow the ladies into the dining-hall. He had not courage enough to offer his arm to either of them. The dinner was a

plain one, but it was served up in genteel style, and Ben's embarrassment was troublesome to him, though he managed to conceal it pretty well. It was the first time in his life that his plate was handed to him by a butler's boy, and he never before used a silver fork a table napkin, or a finger glass. He had often eaten his dinner off a tin plate, and the bare deck for a table, with more comfort than he then experienced, for he fancied he was being quizzed by the old butler, who stood with his back to a side-board, looking as stolid as a guardsman on duty. Ben was somewhat relieved when dinner was over and they all retired to the drawing-room; but even there he felt nervous and awkward, and longed to be away, notwithstanding the demeanour of the ladies was very affable, and quite free from all stiff formality. Had they been in a cottage, he would have perhaps felt happy enough in their company; but the costly surroundings overawed him and impeded the free natural use of his tongue.

Mrs. Marshall was a benevolent-looking lady, about seventy years of age. She had doubtless been very attractive in her youthful days. It has been said, that "in character, in manners, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity"; and Mrs. Marshall evidently understood that. The usual tenor of her conversation also denoted that she was a Christian. Miss Marshall was about twenty years of age, with a tall, graceful figure and a handsome face. Recent sorrow had subdued the buoyancy of spirits which was natural to her, for sometimes the sparkle of her dark eyes and a merry play about her mouth, led Ben to believe that she could be funny and frolicsome if circumstances permitted. Her manner was easy and natural, and the interest she manifested in Ben's simple narrative of his

travels round the world made him feel less shy in her company. Still he could not help feeling that he was out of his position, and that he was not polished enough for the society of such refined ladies. In the course of conversation after dinner, he learnt that Miss Marshall was the only daughter of his deceased shipmate, Dumby. When Ben innocently asked her if her mother was alive, she briefly replied in the negative, and her grandmother thereupon remarked, with a natural sigh, "Edith is the only relative I have left to me in the world. Have you any sisters or brothers living, Mr. Bruce?"

"No, ma'am, not any," Ben replied; and he blushed again, for the question reminded him of the falsehood he had uttered at his first meeting with Mrs. Marshall. He dreaded lest she should ask him any more questions about his birthplace or his parentage, so he modestly hinted that he must go, in order to catch the evening train for London.

"When do you mean to return to your friends in Australia?" asked Mrs. Marshall, as Ben arose to depart.

"Hem—er—I am not quite certain, ma'am. It will depend on circumstances. Perhaps not for a few months."

"Oh, I am glad you are going to stay some time in England. I trust you will let us have the pleasure of seeing you again, Mr. Bruce. I shall be very glad if you will come and spend a week or two with us as soon as you can conveniently do so. I don't know how to express my gratitude for your kindness to my poor son, and for the trouble you have taken in coming to see me. I shall never forget the comfort and relief your visit has given me to-day."

Ben thanked her for the invitation, and said he would come again and see her, if his time permitted; but it

was rather uncertain. Miss Marshall then said, with an earnestness which went direct to his heart : "Oh, do come again, Mr. Bruce !" to which her grandmother rejoined : "Yes ; I shall quite expect you. And will you favour me with your address in London ? I think it is likely that my steward may wish to communicate with you."

That request made Ben feel confused again, and pride at the moment suggested that if he gave the address of his grandmother, the secret of his base origin would soon be known, and what then would they think of him ? He certainly would never get another welcome to Newby Hall ; and no doubt Miss Marshall would be ashamed and vexed that she had said, with such winning frankness to a base-born fellow, "Oh, do come again, Mr. Bruce !" Those perplexing thoughts flashed through his sensitive mind, and then in an instant it occurred to him to give his address at his old employers ; so he said that a letter addressed to him, to the care of Messrs. Chippet Brothers, Bethnal Green, would reach him.

"I have ordered the carriage, Mr. Bruce," said Mrs. Marshall, seeing that Ben was impatient to be gone. "You will have ample time to meet the mail train for London, so do not be uneasy about it."

"Oh, please don't trouble to send your carriage with me, ma'am. I am much obliged to you for your kindness, but I can walk. I have often walked thrice that distance," said Ben excitedly. But both of the ladies said they should not like to see him walking away while their horses were in the stable and wanting exercise ; so Ben was constrained to yield. Soon afterwards a handsome chariot, with two liveried servants, drove up to the front door. Ben bade adieu to his kind friends and got into the carriage, with more grace than might

have been expected, considering that it was the first time in his life that he had been thus honoured. As the footman closed the carriage door, he touched his hat, and asked Ben where he wished to be driven, and was told to drive to the Red Lion, at S——.

When Ben alighted at the hotel there was a great stir among the inmates, and he noticed a marked change in the deportment of the landlady. He was honoured with the best room in the house, and was almost overwhelmed with obsequious attention. He did not stay there long, and he felt greatly relieved when he was alone in a corner of a third-class railway carriage. As the train sped on its way to London, Ben was often reflecting on the kind reception he had met with at Newby Hall. Many times the lovely image of Edith Marshall rose before his mental vision, like a beautiful form in a dream—too fascinating for him to gaze upon, and a stanza of one of Lord Byron's minor poems as often flashed to his memory—

“In flight I shall be surely wise,
Escaping from temptation's snare ;
I cannot view my paradise
Without the wish of dwelling there.”

CHAPTER XXI.

“Then gently scan your brother man ;
Still gentler, sister woman :
Though they may go a kennin’ wrang,
To step aside is human.”

—*Burns.*

ON the evening after Ben’s return to London, he and his friend, Frank Shorter, might have been seen slowly walking up and down a secluded pathway, not far from Hackney Church. The moon was shining brightly, but neither of them could appreciate the poetry of moonlight, for they were not in a fanciful mood just then. Ben had been giving his companion a circumstantial account of his visit to Newby Hall ; and Frank listened in moody silence, which plainly indicated that he was not satisfied with Ben’s report. At length he muttered, with an unusual sharpness of manner, “I tell you what I think, Ben : you have made a regular bungle of this business. Billy King, the half-witted pieman of Sydney, would have managed it more cleverly.”

“Don’t be cross, Frank.”

“Tut ! it’s enough to make a fellow kick himself ! You have wasted a chance that might have been a little fortune to us both—not that I crave money overmuch, but as old Mrs. Marshall is rich and we are poor, it would only be fair for her to pay us for the service we

have done her ; and it's my belief she would have been pleased enough to pay us if you had given her half a chance. I only wish I had been alongside of you ! ”

“ I wish you had been, indeed. I own that I have bungled, and I am grieved enough about it, and have been so, for your sake, ever since I left Newby Hall. It cannot be helped now, but I hope it will be a warning to me as long as I live, to speak the truth at all times, however much a lie may promise to help me. That one little unpremeditated slip which I made at my first meeting with Mrs. Marshall upset me completely, and made me miserable all the time I was there, for I was in constant dread lest I should let out a word that would prove me a liar, and of course make me look contemptible.”

“ You made a sham of yourself, Ben, and you know it. That's the way the devil gets to windward of a simpleton. He coaxes him to tell one shabby lie to begin with, and then he must shore it up with a dozen other lies, for it won't stand alone. I can see plainly enough it was beggarly pride that was at the bottom of it. You were ashamed to let those fine ladies know that your grandmother was a poor woman, who kept a little huckster's shop at Hackney, so you said you were a native-born Australian, and I suppose you hinted that your parents lived there up to their knees in gold-dust and fine wool ; and then of course Mrs. Marshall thought it would only be insulting you to ask if you had a pocket that would hold a few of her spare sovereigns. Bah ! I thought you were more of a man.”

“ I know I deserve blame, Frank, but your cutting remarks are unfair. I am not ashamed of my grandmother because she is poor. I have shown a dutiful care for her many years. Bless her dear old heart ! I

should be ashamed of myself if I were so despicably mean."

"What else can you be ashamed of, but her poverty? The old lady is honest as daylight, and righteous and sober besides! You mustn't try to deceive me, mate; I have seen more than one or two little bits of stuck-up pride in you since you came on shore that I never noticed before, and you may take my word for it, that sort of foolery will be back-sail to you in your cruise through life. You may try to make all the folks in England believe that you are as rich as a lucky digger from Nuggetty Gully, but they will soon find out that it's all a sham, like the gilt stuff on a gingerbread watch. Your money won't hold out many weeks at the wonderful rate you are going now, and then folks will see what you are made of, and you will be called a fool—and perhaps a rogue too. You needn't get vexed with me, Ben, I am speaking out my opinion honestly—there's no sham about me."

"I won't get vexed with you if I can help it, Frank. I know you are a real friend to me, but you don't quite understand me or you would not say so much to hurt my feelings. I have no wish to deceive any one in the world. I have never said a word to induce any one to believe that I am rich, neither have I tried to appear poor or put on a beggar's humility—I cannot do that, and I won't do it.* No man can be more economical than I am without being mean or dishonest. It is true I paid a tailor more than I ought to have done soon after I landed, but that was an unlucky mistake, and I now wish I had bought a suit of sailor's clothes ready-made. I told Listey to make me a good plain suit, and he has made me a suit plain enough as to colour, but the cut is too genteel and fashionable for me, and I am often

mistaken for a gentleman—in fact, I was treated as a gentleman at Newby Hall.”

“Ah, it is very nice and tickling to your vanity, no doubt; but that sort of honour goes for nothing at all when a man is getting hungry. It won’t serve him for rations.”

“Indeed it isn’t very nice to me, Frank, for it seems to excite the envy and malice of some of the people in these parts, who take a savage delight in twitting me about my unhappy history.”

The dejected tone in which Ben spoke touched Frank’s sympathy, and he replied in a softened tone, “What is wrong in your history for these savage natives to jeer you about? If your grandmother is right in her reckoning, you have been one of the best boys in London, barring your running off to sea, which is nothing at all; and I can answer for your good behaviour since I first fell in with you. I am sorry I touched you up so sharply about your pride, mate, for perhaps it isn’t beggarly pride after all, and I never saw anything like sham about you on shipboard. Nature has given you a good-looking face and a smartish figure, and you look more like a gentleman than many warrant officers that I have sailed with. I said as much to your grandmother the morning after you set out on that unlucky cruise, and it made the dear old lady’s eyes water with loving glory.”

“It is very kind of you to say all that, Frank, and I am glad you are not really offended with me. Of my personal history I have not much reason to be ashamed, though I have nothing to boast of. But, but——” Ben hesitated for a minute, and then added, nervously, “I may as well tell you, Frank, for you are sure to hear of it in this gossiping place—my dishonourable birth

makes me unhappy, positively miserable at times. My parents were not married."

"Well, you can't help that, Ben! I don't see why you should hang your honest head down on that score, any more than I should be always fretting because my rascally brother Jem once stole a ship and turned pirate. If that is your top weight of trouble, heave it overboard at once, mate. Nobody with right feeling or common-sense would scorn an honest young fellow for such a misfortune as yours. Are your parents living in Hackney?"

"Oh no: my poor mother has been dead many years, and I have never even heard the name of my father. I don't know who he is, nor where he is, no more than you do. Perhaps if the mystery was removed I should feel less uneasiness. I have never dared to speak to any one on the subject, except to my grandmother; and whenever I have only just hinted at it she has got so excited that I have stopped questioning her, for I cannot bear to see her in trouble."

"Shall I try to fish the matter out for you?"

"No, thank you, Frank. You had better not name the subject. Grandmother has promised to tell me all particulars, and the sooner she does so the better, for this suspense is affecting my spirits more than you have any idea of."

"You may have a quiet opportunity to-morrow, Ben, for you and grandmother will have the house all to yourselves. I am going into the country for a few days, to rest my brain and breathe a little fresh air, for I am getting as flabby as a live seal in a coal cellar. I hope when I come back from my trip I shall see you looking more lively. I think you told me that you didn't tell Mrs. Marshall it was you and I that dug

up the tin box in Fitzroy Gardens? And perhaps you didn't ask her what was inside it?"

"I did not say a word to her about the box or the parcel of manuscript, for I felt a delicacy in saying anything that might cause her fresh sorrow. But don't blame me any more, Frank. I own that I have made a miserable bungle of it; but I will go to Newby Hall again in a week or two, and then I can tell Mrs. Marshall all about the tin box, and explain everything else as far as I can."

"All right, mate. I won't say any more to worry you, and I am sorry I said so much. I now understand what has made you look so dreary ever since we landed. Such a blemish in my history wouldn't trouble me overmuch; but we are not all formed alike, either in our bodies or our minds, and it would be a hard job for the world if we were. Some fellows would hardly feel a kick from a dray-horse, and other thin-skinned chaps would almost wriggle into fits if a flea got under their shirt-collars. You can understand what I mean. But cheer up, my lad! Depend on it, whatever fault your parents committed, you are no more responsible for them than you are for any wicked-roguery there may be in Dumby's tin box, or for the cannibal tricks of old Chewemup, the hungry chief of Savage Island."

"I am sorry I left Melbourne, Frank. While I was there amongst strangers I felt comparatively easy in my mind about my family failings; but I no sooner come back to the place where I was born and reared, and where I might reasonably expect to get sympathy and consideration, than I meet with quite the opposite treatment, and I cannot walk down my native street without hearing personal remarks which wound me like poisoned arrows."

"That's the way of the world, Ben, and you can't stop it by fretting over it. You are very sensitive, and that's a troublesome quality to a man who has to live among a rough lot. But cheer up, mate! Keep your nose above water and your mouth shut, and you'll never drown. We will start off to Melbourne together if I get my certificate, and there you will have a better chance of helping your grandmother than you would if you were to stay and live with her. Ah, that's right, I am glad to see you are brightening up a bit! Now listen to me a minute longer, and I'll tell you of a nice little cruise I have planned for us both; but you mustn't talk about it before grandmother, or I shall be laughed at by some of her tattling customers. In a few weeks' time the hops will be in full bloom, and I propose that we take a run down into Sussex and see Widow Blake's friends. I didn't promise her to do so, but I know it will please the dear old lady, and we owe her something for her kindness to us. I mean to pick out the finest hop plant I can find in her father's grounds, and make a fanciful coil or wreath of it to take back as a present for her. Won't she be pleased to get it, eh Ben?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied Ben, smiling. "It is a very poetical idea of yours, Frank, and I wonder how you came to think of it. But what shall I take her? The hop-pole, I suppose?"

"You can take her a wreath of ivy from the tower of the village church that we have heard her speak of so lovingly, and a sprig from one of the big holly-trees that she said are growing in front of her old house at home. But perhaps it would be better for you to take the girl something—of course it would, I was forgetting her, and she was as kind to you as her mother was. Let me see, what can you take her? Can't you think of

something nice in the rural line, Ben? Something that we can carry without spoiling it?"

"A truss of newly-mown hay from her grandfather's meadow," suggested Ben, "or a gooseberry bush from his back garden."

"Come, come, none of your nonsense, I am not joking. Some folks in Australia think a wonderful deal about a trifle from their early homes in old England. You might take her a bunch of buttercups and daisies from the meadow, she would like them, I daresay."

"That's another happy thought of yours, Frank. Annie Blake likes wild-flowers, I know. I heard her one night recite a beautiful poem of Campbell's. I remember the first three lines:—

'Ye field-flowers! the gardens eclipse you, 'tis true,
Yet, wildlings of nature, I dote upon you,
For ye waft me to summers of old.'

"I have been thinking over this pleasant little jaunt for ever so many nights lately, when my head has been nearly bursting with trigonometrical problems that old Captain Harden has been cramming into it," said Frank. "It is a relief to have something easy to think of in such wakeful seasons, if it is only innocent nonsense. I am glad you approve of my scheme, Ben; it will be a real holiday treat for us both, and it won't cost more than we can afford. Hurrah! for the hops and buttercups!"

"Have you ever been in the hop-growing counties, Frank?"

"No, not yet, mate, but I've heard a lot about hops, and how beautiful they look when they are in blossom, from a young fellow who was a shipmate of mine on my second voyage. Bill Jobson was the son of a hop farmer in Kent. We used to call him 'Hop-pole.' He ran

away from home in a drunken freak, and he was sorry enough for it before he had been half a day at sea. He was always telling us about his nice feather bed in his old dormitory, or of the sides of bacon that hung up in his mother's kitchen chimney, and other soft talk of that sort. But it is natural for a boy to think about his home, if he had a good one."

"Yes, that it is, Frank ; as I know from experience."

"So do I, mate. And though I have been more than thirty years a rover from my native place, recollections of it sometimes start up to my mind as fresh as if it were only last week. 'Seamen's Homes' are excellent institutions, no doubt, and I say, God bless all the good ladies and gentlemen who are taking a kindly interest in them ; but, after all, they are very different to the 'Sweet Home' in the old song, that I've often heard rough-looking sailors sing, with tears in their eyes. Many and many a time when I have been lying in my bunk at sea I have pictured our old village, and in my fancy I could hear the clack, clack of the mill where I used to work when I was a boy, and the rocking of the ship has sometimes made me dream that I was a boy once more, and swimming in the tub on the mill-pond. Before I go to sea again, Ben, I mean to go and spend a week or so about the old spot. I don't suppose I'd know any one there now, but that doesn't matter. I can perhaps find lodgings in some snug cottage home ; and I should like to ramble about, by myself, up and down the green lanes and woods and fields, and look at all the places that I was familiar with when I was a youngster—the willow-pollard by the brook, where I used to hide away when my dad was hunting me with a stick, as he sometimes did when he was tipsy. The old church, too, with its square brick and flint tower, and the

ivy growing up to the top of it and right through the belfry windows. Many a time I have climbed that ivy for sparrows' nests ; and once I got caned by the beadle for nesting on Sunday. Then I should like to look at the graves of my parents, and my little sister Peggy, who was drowned in the mill-stream, where she was picking water-lilies. There is no stone on their graves, but that doesn't matter to them, and I daresay the sexton will know somewhere about where they lie. Heigho ! I sometimes wish that my tub had capsized with me and I had gone to the bottom of the mill-pond when I was a child : I should have been saved from doing a lot of mischief in the world. Ah, yes—you are right, Ben ; it isn't manly or Christian-like to talk in this way, but somehow I don't feel high spirited to-night. I think I will go to bed."

The next morning Frank appeared at the breakfast table in his best clothes, and said that he was going to heave aside his school books and give his old head a rest for a few days, and have a look at the green country.

"What part are you going to?" Ben inquired.

"I daresay I shall be able to smell wild-flowers and hedge blossoms whichever way I steer after I get clear of London. I wish I knew where to find my dear old sister Sally, if she is alive, and then I could tell you my course to half a point. But I haven't heard tidings of her for many years. I sometimes feel as lonely, even in this busy city, as a bear drifting about at sea on an iceberg, for I haven't a single relative that I know where to find. Now I am off, friends," added Frank, rising from the table and taking up his shiny hat. "Take care of yourselves till I come back ; and you needn't be uneasy if you don't see me again till this day week. Good-bye, Ben ! Look after grandmother."

On that evening Widow Bruce shut up shop an hour earlier than usual, and then sat down in her little parlour beside her grandson, to tell him all about his mother and as much as she knew about his profligate father. With much sighing and many pauses to wipe her tearful eyes, the old lady gave Ben his family history, which I must report in a fresh chapter, much more concisely than she narrated it.

CHAPTER XXII.

“The melancholy days are come,
The saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds and naked woods,
And meadows brown and bare.”

—*Bryant.*

“I WILL tell you, first of all, something about your grandfather, as you wish to hear all particulars, Ben; but you must not interrupt me, my dear, or you will put me out, and I shall forget things that I want to remember, for my memory is not so good as it used to be.”

Ben promised his grandmother that he would not interrupt her if he could avoid it; so the old lady began the story which he was so anxious to hear.

“Your grandfather was a gardener, Ben; and for many years he was foreman to Mr. Thorn, the nurseryman, at Primrose Hill, which was a very different place to what it is now that it is all built over. When I lived there it was quite a rural place, and there were not many houses to be seen. There is a wonderful change in the neighbourhood sure enough, and Mr. Thorn’s fine nursery has been rooted up long ago. We had a pretty cottage of our own adjoining Mr. Thorn’s grounds, and as nice a little garden to it as you would wish to see. Your poor grandfather used to work it in his spare hours and on moonlight nights. I used to help him all I could, and it was pleasant work to me, for I was

always fond of flowers since I was a little girl. Your dear mother was our only child, and we were dotingly fond of her. She was quite as fond of flowers as I was, so between us all we made our garden a perfect little paradise, if it isn't wicked to say so. Sophy was a great girl when she left school, for your grandfather was always willing for her to have as much learning as we could afford, and I took care to give her a good training in house work ; and a more tidy, thrifty girl you would not find for fifty miles around London, and that is not saying too much. What a treasure of a wife she would have made to some worthy man ! But, oh dear me ! it won't bear thinking of ! Poor dear creature ! she is dead and gone ; but I often picture her in my memory, tripping about our garden in her pretty white frock and roses in her hair, cutting nosegays for our visitors. We had hosts of holiday folks from the City when the flowers were blooming, but especially in strawberry season. Dear Sophy has taken as much as ten shillings in an afternoon for her bouquets, and she used to say, in her funny way, that she would be rich some day."

"Was my mother pretty when she was a girl ?" asked Ben.

"Indeed she was, my dear ! At sixteen years old she was as tall as I am now, and a perfect model of a figure. She had lovely hazel eyes, and such a crop of beautiful glossy brown hair, ah, and such a happy, kind-looking face ! I never saw her equal in all my life, never ! Everybody used to praise Sophy for her beauty, and for her sweet temper too ; and your grandfather, poor man ! was ten times more proud of his fine daughter than he was of his rare dahlias, for which he once got a prize medal. We had a summer-house at one end of our garden, beneath a large mulberry-tree. It was built in

rustic style, and was covered with flowering climbers and hedged round with sweet-scented shrubs. Oh it was a pretty place, to be sure! Sophy used to call it her fairy bower. Many visitors from the City would sit there for hours, eating strawberries from our garden, and sometimes we sold them cream too, for we kept a cow. After a while our place used to be thronged with visitors on Sundays, and we were kept busy the whole day long. Such life as there was there nobody ever did see! But to that Sabbath-day trading I can trace all the family misfortunes that have befallen us. How can I do that? I'll soon show you, Ben. It is painfully clear to me.

"The Rector of the parish did not approve of our Sunday traffic, for it kept us all from church, and kept the whole village in a commotion; so he called one day to talk to us about it. He was as good a parson as ever preached, I do believe, but his manner was sometimes rather sharp when speaking to poor folks, as if he thought their feelings were not easily touched. Your grandfather was offended at the outspoken honesty of the Rector, and thought he was interfering with his rights and liberties, as the house and grounds were his own. Perhaps if his reverence had spoken in a smoother mood your grandfather would have yielded directly, for he was not an obstinate man, indeed, he was as mild a man as he could be until he began to drink. However, so it was, they were both excited, and they had some high words, and the parson went away looking very much hurt. A few days afterwards Mr. Thorn spoke to your grandfather, and told him that he must either give up his Sunday trading or give up his post as foreman in the nursery. It was supposed that Mr. Thorn, who was a churchwarden, had been influenced by the parson,

and your grandfather was more angry than ever. He had saved a little money, and he thought he was quite independent of Mr. Thorn and of everybody else. He bluntly told his master so, and was discharged on the spot. He then determined, in order to spite the parson and his churchwarden, to build a public-house and set up tea-gardens. Oh dear, dear! it makes me grieve when I think of it, Ben. It was the worst thing my poor husband ever planned, and he sipped sorrow over it. It was done in the spirit of revenge and in open violation of God's law to keep holy the Sabbath-day; and we might as well have looked for fruit on our furze hedges, as for success to follow such ill-devised plans."

"I don't believe in Sunday work, grandmother."

"Neither do I, my dear, and I have sad cause for disliking it, but you shall hear all about our troubles and trials. We had to borrow money on our cottage and ground to build the inn; then we were obliged to go in debt for furniture, and for liquor and other things that were necessary for our trade, and which altogether cost us nearly twice as much as we had calculated beforehand. Your grandfather disliked debt more than he did the grubs that destroyed his choice bulbs, and from the day he opened the 'Mulberry Bush,' which was the sign of our house, to the day he was carried to his death-bed, I can safely say he never had an hour's real comfort of mind, except when he was asleep. He used to say debt crippled him, like a rusty nail sticking up in his boot.

"For the first few months we did a brisk trade, for it was summer time and our house was nearly always full of customers. But I did not like it a bit, for I had never been used to have my home comfort upset by noisy, half-tipsy folk; and the scenes in the tea-gardens on

Sundays were sometimes quite shocking. I began to protest against such a shameful desecration of the Lord's-day, for I had been taught in early life to keep it holy ; but your grandfather used to scoff at my appeals. He said we had our living to get, and we couldn't afford to be very particular ; besides, the more row there was on Sundays the better it would punish the Rector, for his presumption in lecturing a free and independent rate-payer of the parish. When the winter months came there were very few City visitors to our house, and trade fell off almost to nothing. There was not much then about the place to attract visitors, for our garden looked bare and was often covered with snow ; the rustic bower at the end was stripped of its verdant covering, and there were no bright flowers to be seen. It was dreary enough outside our house, but, oh dear, it was far worse inside—gloomy indeed ! for in addition to the anxiety of knowing that we were drifting hopelessly into debt, we had a cause of misery and sorrow in our hearts, which no one can fully comprehend except a fond parent, who has had the pride of her eyes and the joy of her heart and the hope of her life all blighted by one cruel crushing wrong."

Widow Bruce covered her face in her apron, and for several minutes sat in silent grief. Ben passed his arm round her neck tenderly, and bade her go on with her story, which was becoming intensely interesting to him. Presently she got more composed, and thus resumed her sorrowful narrative.

"Our dear girl's manner became as much changed as the aspect of our garden grounds. We never heard her sing at her work, and her merry ringing laugh never enlivened our home, as it had often done in other days. Her dejected looks and her frequent sighs could not

escape my notice, though her father did not see it: for, poor man! he had begun to drink very hard, to drown his sense of debt and ruin that seemed to be hanging over us, like a mountain of snow. At length I discovered the cause of poor Sophy's distress of mind, and oh, what a shock that was to my heart! The burning of our house and loss of all our goods would have been nothing to it. I shall never forget that sad night as long as I live! I doted on my child, and had bestowed all the care and tenderness on her that love could prompt: or I fancied I had, but, alas! I had not been watchful enough over her. There I sadly failed in my duty, and I could see it when it was too late. To witness her bitter anguish and her self-reproaches, was additional torture to me, and I was on the verge of madness. Pray don't interrupt me just now, Ben, my dear; you shall hear his name, and all I know about him, if you will have patience and courage to listen.

"It was several days before I could make up my mind to tell your grandfather the harrowing news: for he had become so very irritable from the effects of monetary troubles and drink combined, that at times he lost all control of himself and became dangerously violent, enough to frighten anybody. He loved our girl as he loved his life, and I dreaded that he might, in the first outburst of rage at hearing my disclosure, commit some terribly rash act on her betrayer and perhaps on himself also. Ah me! ah me! Misfortunes seldom come singly, it is said, and I have proved the adage to be too true. One morning, after I had lain awake all night, thinking how I could break the news to your grandfather in the gentlest way possible, I put my hand on his shoulder and said to him softly, 'Johnny, come into the back parlour with me for awhile, I have something to tell you.'

He looked at me more kindly than usual, for he was pretty sober just then, and said, 'I will be with you in ten minutes, mother; the dray is coming with the ale.' A brewer's dray stopped at the door, and your grandfather went to help the drayman to lower a cask of ale into the cellar. In doing so the rope slipped, and the heavy cask rolled on to poor dear grandfather, and injured him in a shocking manner. He was carried to his bed, and there he lay for six weeks until he died. In the meantime the good Rector came to see him often, and I believe that he truly repented of all his sins, and cast himself on the merits of Christ for salvation."

"Did he know of my poor mother's condition?"

"Yes, my dear; I told him of it a fortnight before he died. Oh dear! how he did cry, poor man! I thought he would have broken his heart. He never said a harsh word to dear Sophy, and he begged me never to reproach her, and to keep the affair as secret as possible. Almost his last words were a prayer to God to help and comfort his poor unhappy child. On the very morning after he died, you were born, Ben. I leave you to imagine my double weight of trouble, I cannot describe it."

The old lady again became deeply affected, and wept piteously.

"Don't say any more about this distressing subject, grandmother," said Ben soothingly. "Only tell me the name of the man who caused all this sorrow, and I will not ask you any more questions. This excitement is more than you can bear, and I'm afraid you will be ill."

"I am better now, dear. Sit down again and I will tell you the whole story; it is only right that you should know it. Your father was a gay, worthless young man, Ben; I won't call him a gentleman, though he was

supposed to be one. Good principles make a gentleman, not merely money and a fine exterior. He first came to our house one Sunday in a carriage and pair, with three other young men as wild and reckless as himself. He often came to our house afterwards by himself, and sometimes he stayed for days together; and as he spent his money freely, your grandfather thought he was a good customer, and was always glad to see him. He would often sit in the rustic summer-house the whole afternoon. He told us he was studying. Yes, he was indeed! He was *studying* with all his fascinating powers to overshadow our home with shame and sorrow. I was usually too busy in the bar to see what was going on outside the house, and Sophy was almost always in the garden, cutting flowers for visitors—in short I was too unsuspicious, as many other parents are this day. Poor Sophy was young and inexperienced, and——”

“Who was the man, and what was he, grandmother?” Ben asked sternly, and began to pace the room in great excitement.

“Sit down quietly, my dear, and I’ll tell you. His name was Gordon. I believe he had chambers in the Temple, and he used to say he was studying law. Ugh! law indeed! We may pray to be saved from such law as men of his class study. A solicitor, who then lived near Primrose Hill, called on me and advised me to bring an action against Gordon, and said I might get heavy damages, for he was rich. But your grandfather had, on his death-bed, cautioned me against that very thing, and I dreaded the exposure; besides, it would have been almost a death stroke to your poor mother to put her into a witness-box to be talked to by lawyers: she was such a timid, sensitive creature. For many

months she could scarcely hold up her head in our own house, and did not stir out of doors. The good Rector, Rev. Mr. Wills, came to see me often, and I shall never forget his kindness and the attention of his wife to my broken-spirited girl. Their good Christian-like advice and help influenced her as long as she lived. Ah! if ever any poor unlucky girl in this world repented of her frailty, your mother did, Ben; and that thought gives me more comfort than I can express to you.

“Mr. Wills found out where young Gordon’s parents lived, and he wrote to them for me. Of course I don’t know what he said in the letter, but about a week afterwards old Mr. Gordon, a very kind-looking gentleman, drove up to our house in his carriage. He stopped and had a long talk with me, and I recollect he kissed you as you lay in your poor mother’s arms. He proposed that I should go to Scotland to my friends, who lived there, and take your mother and you with me, and he said he would pay all the travelling expenses and give us four hundred pounds besides. He also promised that if we kept his family name secret, he would give us two hundred pounds more when you were fourteen years of age, if you lived so long. Mr. Wills advised me to accept the offer, which I did, and the money was paid to me a few days afterwards, before two witnesses. Soon afterwards, I gave up the inn and everything in it to my creditors, and was about to start into Scotland, when I was taken ill with brain fever, and was at death’s door for several weeks. When I recovered I thought I would rather not go to live near my friends, who I feared might look with coldness on your dear mother, for such faults as she committed are held in great abhorrence amongst decent folk in my native country. It is good for the purity of home life, and the well-being of society,

that it should be so, but it is not right to be cruel or unforgiving even to the most guilty wretch alive. Your mother had a great dread of going to Scotland to meet with my relatives ; so, unknown to our good friend Mr. Wills, we came to live at Hackney, which was then a much smaller and quieter place than it is now. I took this little shop, and have lived here ever since. Your mother was expert with her needle, and she got work from a warehouse in the City ; so between us we managed to keep a respectable home over our heads, and to bring you up carefully. You can remember when she died, and how peacefully she went off, the darling creature ! ”

“ Yes, I can, grandmother ; but tell me, did young Gordon ever come to see my mother after I was born ? ”

“ Never, my dear ! never ! Not he, indeed ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Bruce emphatically. He knew my spirit and temper too well to venture near the house, and I have never but once set eyes on him since I left Primrose Hill. Still, I have heard a little of his wicked doings, and of the sad trouble he has given his good parents.”

“ Where is he now, grandmother ? ”

“ I have not the least idea, Ben ; but wherever he is, if he does not mend his ways, he will certainly come to a bad end. I believe that as firmly as I believe I am now sitting in this arm-chair. I never mention his name to any one, and I hope you will never name him to me after this night.”

“ Very well, grandmother, I'll be careful not to do so. But tell me, did old Mr. Gordon fulfil his promise and send you two hundred pounds after I turned fourteen years of age ? ”

“ He did not, my dear ; and that is the reason why I

apprenticed you to Mr. Chippet. I would have given you a better trade if I could have afforded it. I wrote to Rev. Mr. Wills at the time, but got no reply. I supposed the Gordons found out that I had not gone to Scotland to live, and they were offended ; so I struggled on and tried to do the best I could for you, without asking help from any one. I have a proud spirit, you know, Ben, though I am poor ; the Bruces always have been a proud family. Your poor mother was much the same temper as myself, though sorrow softened her a good deal more than it has me."

"I think I am troubled with your proud spirit to some extent, grandmother."

"I shouldn't wonder if you are, my boy ; but so long as it is honest pride you needn't fret about it. You always had a good deal of your poor mother's gentleness of disposition, and you often remind me of her, poor dear girl ! She and I have had much annoyance to put up with in this locality, especially since it has become so crowded with small houses, but we have tried to live to ourselves. Your mother had no associates, for she always had a shrinking dread of gossips ; besides, she was nearly always at work, and she was seldom free from bodily pain. She was devotedly fond of you, Ben, and hundreds, ay, thousands of times, she has prayed that you might grow up to be a good man ; and so have I prayed for you, my dear, and I have acted for you too. Many a disagreement I have had with neighbours, because I would not allow you to play with their boys and girls in the streets at night ; but I was determined to be watchful over your morals, if I had failed in my duty to your dear mother. It certainly is not my fault if you learnt any bad habits in your boyhood. But I must not boast. Truly I have nothing to boast of, but

much to deplore. My poor overladen heart is sometimes very weary of the world ; but I must wait my appointed time in it. I humbly thank God for numberless mercies in the past, and I strive to live from day to day in preparation for my home in heaven, where I shall meet my darling girl again, in perfect innocence and peace, safe from the wiles of treacherous men, and from the scourge of cruel tongues. ' There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' "

Widow Bruce buried her face in her apron and wept piteously. Her story was ended.

CHAPTER XXIII.

And the heart that is soonest awake to the flowers,
Is always the first to be touched by the thorns."

—*Moore.*

IT was past midnight when grandmother finished her sorrowful story. Ben said all he could to soothe and comfort her, and then he retired to his bedroom ; but not to sleep, for the incidents of the story were whirling in his brain, and he passed a restless night. His haggard appearance when he sat down to breakfast the next morning caused the grandmother some anxiety, but in reply to her inquiries, he said there was nothing the matter with his health. It was plain to her, however, that something was woefully depressing his spirits. She surmised that her disclosures overnight were the cause, and she was sorry that she had not kept her lips sealed on the subject. They sat for awhile wrapped in their own troublesome thoughts. Presently Ben broke the silence by asking in a brusque tone, quite unusual with him, "Tell me, grandmother, do the neighbours about here know of my base birth?"

"Yes, no doubt they do, my dear. There are not many family affairs in this street, but what are talked of freely enough. But you shouldn't worry about that. Nobody can fairly blame you for what you cannot help."

"I want you to tell me, grandmother, if they know

my fa—— I mean, do they know the treacherous man who caused you so much sorrow ? ”

“ No, I am sure they do not ; and they are vexed because I don’t choose to tell them all I know of him. Of course they say all sorts of cruel things about us, for people will talk you know, and we can’t stop them if we try ever so much. No decent family in this world was ever quite free from the slander of envious tongues, and the tattling of gossips and busybodies.”

“ What do they say of us ? I mean, whom do they say my father is ? That is the plainest way of putting the question—though it pains me to ask it.”

“ You would not like to hear all their scandal, Ben, so I had better not tell you, especially as there is no truth in what they say about us.”

“ Well, pray don’t tell me any more, grandmother, for perhaps I could not bear to hear it. I have already heard almost too much for my heart to carry. Oh I do wish you would get out of this unpleasant neighbourhood—that you would make up your mind to go with me to Melbourne. I am sure you would like the place. It is a fine large city, and the climate is delightful. No long dismal winter there, and the flowers are always blooming, and the birds are always singing. There we might live in peace and comfort, free from these petty annoyances, for nobody in that new land cares a jot about a man’s parentage, so long as he is upright and honest himself. I could soon get work there of some sort, if I could not work at my trade, and you would be relieved from the necessity of cooping yourself up in a dingy little shop, where you never see a ray of sunshine or breathe fresh air ; and above all, we should both be far enough away from neighbours who take a delight in tormenting us about the unhappy blots in our family history.”

"It is not easy to run away from one's tainted history, Ben, in these days when news flies a thousand times faster than the birds. Besides, nobody around us can say that we are dishonest, or intemperate, or noisy brawlers, or anything of the sort. Let any stranger ask the Rector for my character: he has known me twenty years, or more."

"I do not dread so much what people can say of us if they keep to the truth, grandmother. It is their lies that I so abominate; and how is it possible for us to refute them?"

"I don't believe that lies really damage any one but the person who utters them, Ben. If they were only as hurtful as the sting of a bee, I should have been stung to death long ago; for liars have been very busy with my affairs. I have suffered much in that way from envious tongues, and so did your poor mother."

"Confound their tongues! They would drive me crazy very soon."

"Hush, Ben, my dear! don't get so excited. You really frighten me. I never saw you go on in this way before—never. You seem quite changed."

"I am sorry I spoke so hastily, grandmother," said Ben, kissing her tenderly. I cannot help this nervous excitement, which I have exhibited ever since I came back to this place. You don't feel so keenly as I do, or you could not stop here and keep your senses. Oh I do wish you would agree to start with me to Australia before the winter sets in. I will take care of you on the voyage. You shall have a cabin to yourself, and shall not want for anything that I can get you. Do make up your mind to go with me, grandmother."

"You are very kind, my dear boy, and I will do anything I can to please you, but I cannot consent to leave

this part—nothing would induce me to do it. Your poor mother died in this house, and here I shall stay until I am carried out to be laid beside her. It is not a pleasant neighbourhood, but there is something to put up with, you know, Ben, in every condition of life. Go where you may, you will be sure to meet with crosses, in some shape or other, especially if you appear to keep yourself a little above the folks that you live amongst. Some of our neighbours are common enough, but I have got used to their ways, or I have learned to put up with them, and I am not often disturbed by them. Your coming back so suddenly has been a sort of nine days' wonder, because you were supposed to be dead, and there has been more stir than usual in the street on that account, and because you have come back rich, and you won't tell anybody where you got your money."

"I am not rich, grandmother, I have told you that several times before; and you may be sure I got the little money that I have by honest means."

"Of course I know that, my dear; and I don't want you to tell me what money you have. But I was going to say, the present excitement in this place will soon settle down, and you will be happy enough here, when you get more used to the ways of the neighbours."

"I would never despise our neighbours for their poverty, grandmother, far from it, but I do abhor vulgar actions and slangy talk."

"Do be more calm, my love. Listen while I tell you what I have been planning for you during the last week. No, no, Ben, I am not going to say another word about a donkey-cart, so do listen quietly. You know old Mr. Chippet was always kind to me. He used to pity poor Sophy; and it was through him that she got work at

the fancy warehouse in the City. He took you apprentice without a penny of premium, and now and then he has given me an old left-off coat of his own to make up into a jacket for you."

"Yes, yes, grandmother. I remember he was very kind to me all the while I lived in his house, and I shall never forget his good advice; but what has all that to do with what we were talking of?"

"Pray do not be so impatient, boy! I'll show you in a minute or two. I was going to say, that since Mr. Chippet's death, his sons, Peter and Isaac, have taken the business, but I dare say you have heard that news. They are nice young men; and though some folks say they are proud and haughty, I don't think it, for they used to play with you sometimes when you were boys together. Now I am thinking that if I called on them and asked them to take you into their employ again, they would do it for old acquaintance sake, and they might perhaps give you some light work or make a foreman of you."

"It is not at all likely, grandmother, that they would put an experienced foreman out of his place to make room for me, even if I would consent to their doing it, which I never could do, because it would be unfair; and if they were to give me my old post again in the factory at full time wages, what prospect should I have of advancing in life, of earning anything beyond a bare livelihood? Besides, I am not so sure that I have the goodwill of the young men, though their father was kind to me. Peter Chippet disliked the sharp rebuke I gave him, five years ago, when he made a coarse remark about my mother, before some of the workmen in the factory. He has never looked pleasantly at me since that day."

"Ah, men do sometimes feel ill-will towards persons they have insulted. I forgot that little tiff between you and Master Peter. But if you should not go back to the factory, Ben, I am sure something else will turn up if you have patience, for you are strong and active and willing to work. The other day there was an undersexton wanted for our church, and if you had been here it is likely enough you would have got that situation, for the minister knows us well, as I told you before; and he always politely says, 'How do you do, Mrs. Bruce?' whenever he sees me."

Just then the colloquy was interrupted by the entrance of a boy into the shop, who called out in a pert tone, "Is Squire Bruce at home?"

"What do you want, my lad?" asked Mrs. Bruce, going behind the counter. "Who did you ask for?"

"Here's a letter for Benjamin Bruce, Esq. Ho, ho! hatters' blocks! they'll call me a squire next!" The urchin chuckled derisively as he threw the letter on the counter. "The postman left it at our factory just now, and Mr. Peter Chippet told me to bring it here, and to give his best compliments to Squire Bruce, of Hatbox Lodge."

Those remarks were overheard by Ben, who stepped into the shop and took the letter from the saucy boy, and gave him twopence, which was more than he deserved. He touched his cap with mock deference, and went away to tell the incident to the first person he met. In a few hours it was being repeated with variations by a hundred gossiping tongues, and all sorts of speculations were made concerning the purport of a letter addressed in such a stylish way to old Widow Bruce's stuck-up grandson.

"That is a very genteel way to direct a letter to

you, Ben," remarked his grandmother, smiling. "Quite grand, I declare, and fashionable too."

"Yes, grandmother, it is indeed ; far more grand or fashionable than I like. You can see how it gets me jeered at."

"I think it was very unkind of Master Peter to send such a ridiculous message by that impudent boy. But never mind, my dear ! Jeering words won't break your bones, nor they needn't affect your self-respect. You look genteel, Ben, and I believe that's what makes some of the folks cross with you. Mrs. Browning, over the way, said to me only a day or two ago : ' Mrs. Bruce, I declare your grandson looks more of a gentleman than our new curate does.' Yes, and she is right too. No doubt that letter is from some one who does not know your humble position. Hadn't you better open it, my dear ? "

"Yes, grandmother, I am going to do so," said Ben, and he retired to his bedroom and read the following letter :

"NEWBY HALL, 10th July, 18—.

"My dear Sir,—I feel exceedingly sorry that your business in the City prevented your staying longer with us last week, but I do hope you will, when it is convenient to you, pay us another visit, and I think I may promise that both myself and my grand-daughter will be better able to make your visit agreeable than we were on the last occasion. I must own that my wish to see you again is to some extent selfish : I am most anxious to hear every detail I possibly can respecting my late unfortunate son, and there are some things which I omitted to ask you. I shall be glad if you can arrange to stay a few weeks at the Hall. The weather just now is very inviting, and the country

around our house is looking charming. I trust you will pardon me for the liberty I take in enclosing you a bank draft for £100. Pray do not suppose that I think you desire pecuniary remuneration for the kind service you have rendered me. You will, perhaps, favour me by purchasing something, which your taste will suggest, to keep as a slight token of my gratitude for services the value of which no sum of money could estimate.

“Believe me to remain, my dear Sir,

“Yours very truly,

“EMILY MARSHALL.”

“Benjamin Bruce, Esq.,

“Messrs. Chippet Brothers,

“Bethnal Green.”

Grandmother was very anxious to know whom the letter was from, so Ben told her it was from a lady whose son he had met in Australia; and in order to save himself from being further questioned, he started into the City to get his bank draft cashed. On his return home his grandmother handed him another letter, that had come by post, and was addressed in more modest style, “Mr. B. Bruce, care of Mrs. Rachel Bruce, Hackney.” Ben opened the letter, and found it was from a Mr. Mead, of S——, and wished Ben to send, as early as possible, all the particulars he knew about a man named Frank Shorter. Ben had no objection to his grandmother seeing that letter, so he handed it to her.

“What do you think of it, my dear? The poor man hasn’t got into any trouble, I hope? Sailors are such comical men when they are on shore, there is no guessing what they will do sometimes.”

“I hope he is all right, grandmother. I think the letter is from some shipowner in S—— who is going

to give Frank a mate's berth, and wishes to know his character before engaging him. I must reply at once, for a letter from me may be useful."

Ben then sat down and wrote a careful account of all he knew about Frank, from the time they first met on board the *Wolf*. It was rather too long a letter to send to a business man, but Ben was anxious to do justice to his absent friend. He also wrote a polite note to Mrs. Marshall, acknowledging her present in suitable terms; but afterwards he decided not to send it until he had conferred with Frank as to the expediency of going to Newby Hall again.

Notwithstanding that Ben had so much to incite him to cheerfulness, and the fact that he had more money in his possession than he ever had before, he was more dreary than he had been in the darkest days of his poverty. Like most strong young men, Ben needed plenty of active exercise to keep him in health. On board the *Monarch* he had always found work to do in his short intervals of cessation from study; but since he landed in England he had done no work—had lived a gentleman's life, as he said, and fared better than usual at his indulgent grandmother's table, so he naturally felt out of sorts, without exactly knowing the cause. No doubt that slight derangement of his physical system increased his innate sensitiveness, and made him irritable. As I said before, he had been subjected to a good deal of vexation from some of the neighbours who knew him as a boy, and whose jealousy and envy were aroused because he did not show a desire to be over intimate with them now he was a man, and perhaps because he had not squandered all his money amongst them in public-house treats or loans. The barbarous usage he endured from Neptune's crew when he first crossed the

equator was less exciting to him than the slangy personal remarks he usually overheard when he walked up or down Back Street, from the idlers standing at the open doorways, or from some of the children, who had the free run of the streets in those days, when Board Schools were not in existence. He was returning to his grandmother's, after going to post the letter he had written to Mr. Mead, when he was rudely assailed by a boy, who had doubtless been prompted by some of the mischief-loving adults. Ben stopped and calmly rebuked the boy, but that only made him more impudent, so Ben gave him two or three touches on his back with a hazel switch.

The punishment was slight, but Ben had immediate cause to regret giving even that modicum, for quick as Burns' witches issued from the haunted ruin at the sound of Tam O'Shanter's applauding voice, several able-bodied women stepped from their doorways, and Ben would have been roughly handled by them if he had not made a hasty retreat. The excited matrons then grouped in front of his grandmother's shop-door: and such an unpromising lot of customers no respectable tradeswoman would ever wish to see near her shop. There was the mother of the saucy boy, and perhaps six or seven of his aunts, for they all seemed equally furious in his defence, and their attitude was menacing in the extreme. They yelled and clamoured for Ben to go outside for half a minute; but as they made no secret of their intention to "crack his head" if he did go out, no sensible person will blame him for preferring to stay inside, and out of sight of his noisy foes. There he sat in the back parlour, in a peculiar state of uneasiness, like a captive negro waiting his turn to be baked and eaten, while his grandmother stood in the shop,

trembling for the fate of her front windows and her show glasses. Business was slack for the remainder of the day, and she was glad when it was shutting-up time.

Ben went to bed earlier than usual that night, but it was long before sleep came to the relief of his wearied brain; and when it did come it was disturbed by fancies of a horribly exciting kind. He dreamt that he was again on board the *Wolf*, which was lying at anchor in some port of New Zealand, quite strange to him, when a canoe full of naked savages came alongside. They clubbed the captain and mate and all the sailors, and then came to the galley to club him; but he fastened the doors, and kept the cannibals off by throwing ladlesful of boiling hot soup at them through the galley window, and all the while he was shouting for Frank to come to his help. When the soup copper was emptied and he had no more ammunition, he was obliged to surrender to his foes, who burst open the galley doors and were dragging him out head foremost, when, lo! he was awakened by his grandmother shaking him up with all her might. But it was half a minute before he was fully conscious that he was in friendly hands.

"Oh, my dear boy! whatever is the matter with you?" asked grandmother, in tremulous tones. "Do speak rationally to me, Ben; I can't understand that foreign gibberish."

"Hey—oh—ah! Mercy 'pon us! is it you, grandmother?"

"Yes, yes, it's grandmother. Lie down. What ails you, my love?"

"I have been dreaming, I suppose. I am glad you aroused me. Oh my!"

"Dear me! how you alarmed me! I do hope and trust they did not hear your shouting at the fire-brigade

station, round the corner, or they'll be here with the engines directly. What were you dreaming of, dear?"

"Oh, an old story of Frank's got into my head; that's what caused it. What a fright I have had, to be sure!"

"He certainly must be a bad man to tell you stories that would make you call out in that shocking manner. I should have thought he knew better."

"Don't be unjust to the man, grandmother. It was a little affair he told me of that occurred when he was in a brig, on a trading voyage to the Solomon group. One day, when the captain and all the sailors were on shore trading, and only the cook was left to take care of the ship, a lot of cannibal natives came on board, and the poor cook kept them at bay, till the captain returned, by throwing ladlesful of scalding water at them from his galley coppers. That was all about Frank's story, in a few words, and there was no harm in it you see, grandmother."

"Perhaps not; still I don't fancy it. It has upset you terribly, and made you frighten me more than enough. Now try to compose your mind to sleep again, my dear. Remember that nice, comforting verse in the evening hymn, that your dear mother used to like so much. It is usually a part of my prayer every night before I go to rest:—

'If in the night I sleepless lie,
My soul with heavenly thoughts supply;
Let no ill dreams disturb my rest,
No powers of darkness me molest!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ But sorrow returned with the dawning of morn,
And the voice in my dreaming ear melted away.”

—*Campbell.*

EARLY the next morning Ben received a friendly warning that there was a conspiracy among some of the spirited women in the street to punish him with their own hands if they could catch him. He quietly resolved that they should not catch him if he could help it, so he stayed at home the remainder of the week, and employed himself in making paper bags for his grandmother's grocery department. On Sunday grandmother urged him to go to church with her ; but though he fain would have gone, he thought it was safer for him to remain at home. From the unsaintly character of his feminine adversaries, he judged that reverence for the day would not overawe their avowed intent to punish him if they caught him in the street ; indeed, he might expect to be doubly punished through the co-operation of the husbands of the locality, who were usually at home on Sundays. After a little consideration, Mrs. Bruce decided that Ben was justified in staying from church, under the circumstances, so she trudged away by herself.

On Monday morning the postman brought a letter for Ben, which he was at first delighted to find was from his trusty friend, Frank. Grandmother was very anxious

to hear of Frank's well-being, so Ben began to read the letter aloud; but soon perceiving that it touched on certain matters of which it was not desirable for her to know, he retired to his room and read as follows. His astonishment at seeing where the letter was dated from may easily be imagined:—

“NEWBY HALL, 16th July.

“Dear Ben,—I daresay you will be taken aback when you find where I am moored at present; but don't be cross with me till you hear me tell the reason why I steered in this direction. Here I am snug enough. I never was in such prime quarters before, either on shore or afloat; and I would not mind making fast here for life, if I did not believe it is impossible for me to stop on shore and keep my health, unless I had active work of some sort.

“You know, Ben, I was upset at the queer way you managed things when you were down here. I did not say all I thought about it, because I saw that you were vexed with yourself, and it is not safe to say much to a man at such times. But I fancied it was a pity to let a rare chance slip of doing us both good, so I came here direct; and it is a lucky job for us that I did so, as you will see when I come back and tell you all about it. You may be sure I have not been so much of a gentleman as you were, and I have sailed under my true colours; but if I were a rear-admiral I could not receive greater kindness. Mrs. Marshall took me for a pirate, I think, when I first showed myself; but after Mr. Mead, the steward, got the letter from you, giving me such a first-rate character, the old lady was as kind to me as I could wish, and the young lady too. They had me into the grand parlour, and asked me no end of questions about poor Dumby, and I told them all I knew, over

and over again. They invited me to take my meals with them in the saloon, but I would not have that honour, so I mess with the servants on saloon fare. I would have started for London several days ago, but Mr. Mead has promised to speak to a friend of his, who owns three ships out of the port of S—, and he thinks he may get me a berth as mate if I pass my examination all right. I am waiting till I hear from Mr. Mead ; but I think it is likely I shall be home about Wednesday next, and then I will turn out all my budget of news. Mrs. Marshall asked me a lot of questions about you, and you may be sure I did not give you a bad character, after the superfine one you gave me to Mr. Mead. I can see that you have got well into the favour of her and her pretty granddaughter, and I half fancy the girl is a bit smitten with you. They said they had no idea you had been a sailor, because you were so mild and gentle in your manner ; so I up and told them, for the honour of our calling, that there are, now and then, as good natural gentlemen to be found in the fore-castle of a ship as there are at a Lord Mayor's feast. Mrs. Marshall said she had written to you the day before I called on her, but she feared her letter had miscarried, as you had not answered it. She is going to London to-morrow, for she seems mighty anxious to see you again, and the young lady is going with her. I have told them where you are living ; so stand by, Ben, to see a grand carriage drive up to grandmother's shop door in a day or two. I give you this hint, unknown to them, so that you may keep yourself in trim, and be ready at the gangway to receive your visitors in man-o'-war's style. Of course I have told Mrs. Marshall that it was you and I that found the tin box, and gave it, with the parcel of manuscripts, to Mr. Blackstone ; she did

not know that little fact before. She said there was a large reward offered for the recovery of the tin box, which contained securities of great value, and that we should be rewarded for our pains ; so I expect to go back to you with golden ballast in both pockets. I have lots more news, but you must wait for it till I see you, for writing long letters is rather out of my line. With my duty to your grandmother, I remain, dear Ben,

"Yours to command,

"FRANK SHORTER.

"P.S.—Mr. Mead has just been here, and given me a bank cheque for a hundred pounds. Hurrah ! Didn't I tell you this cruise would make our fortunes ? Tell granny I'll paint her shop front when I come back, and make it look as smart as a barber's pole."

For two hours after receiving the letter, Ben was pacing his little room in a very perturbed state of mind. It might reasonably be supposed that a young man in Ben's position would be overjoyed at receiving such a hopefully written letter, but it had a contrary influence on him, and he was perplexed beyond measure. When he at length descended to the parlour to resume his work at bag-making, his grandmother saw that something was troubling him, and she gently pressed him to tell her what it was. But he said he did not wish to explain his private affairs just then ; so she wisely refrained from asking him any more questions, and tried, in various ways, to raise his drooping spirits. He soon put aside his work and returned to his bedroom, and throughout the afternoon he was there alone, planning and re-planning his future course of action, until his brain ached from the bewildering exercise. He was exceedingly annoyed at Frank's sayings and doings, and thought it was sly and mean of him to go to

Newby Hall without stating that he was going there ; and though it was plain enough that the honest old sailor thought he had shown a master-stroke of policy in doing what the other was too modest to do, Ben was wholly dissatisfied with him. All kinds of unpleasant surmises arose in his mind as to what Frank, in his simplicity, had said about him to Mrs. Marshall ; and he could not but believe that she had discovered that almost the first sentence he spoke in her house was untrue, and she would naturally be doubtful of everything else he had said.

“One unwary slip from the truth—or one lie, that’s the plainest name for it—has caused me all this embarrassment,” sighed Ben, and he pressed his hands to his aching head. “To be proved a liar is—is—bah ! I cannot bear the thought of it ; I’d almost as soon be convicted as a thief or a forger ! If Frank has told Mrs. Marshall and her granddaughter all he knows of my history, and I fear he has, how contemptible I must appear in their eyes ! A base-born journeyman hat-box maker, out of work, dressed up in a dandy coat, ashamed to own my only relative because she is poor ! They will surely imply, as Frank did, that that was my motive in disguising my position. Perhaps they may conclude that I have been trying to ape the gentleman with some swindling design, like a common pickpocket. And how vexed Miss Marshall must feel that she said, in such a kind friendly way, ‘Oh, do come and see us again, Mr. Bruce !’ Go and see them again, indeed ! I shall never have the impudence to do that, and I shall be ashamed to look them in the face if they come to see me. No doubt the object of Mrs. Marshall, in coming to London in such haste, is to inquire after her letter with the bank draft in it, which I

have not had the common civility to answer ; and she will most likely go to Chippet's factory first of all, to ask if the letter arrived there. If she should see Peter Chippet, he will give her his opinion of me without reserve ; and I know pretty well what that will be, for I daresay he is annoyed at my having had a letter directed to his care, without first asking his leave. Oh, how stupid it was of me not to reply to Mrs. Marshall's letter immediately ! It is too late to write now, for she is on her way to London, and will most likely be here to-morrow morning. What shall I do ? ”

Ben paused for a few minutes as if waiting for an answer, and then he resumed his exciting soliloquy. “ If Mrs. and Miss Marshall should drive down this street in their stylish carriage, there will be a commotion among the neighbours. And how can I receive those kind ladies with becoming respect, when I dare not show myself outside of grandmother's shop ? And what if some of those furious women should crowd about the carriage as it drives up to our door, and begin to abuse me again, and their yells should make the horses bolt, and upset the carriage, and kill or maim the ladies ! Oh dear me ! I shall go crazy if any such disaster should happen.”

Ben's highly wrought fancy might have conjured up dire mishaps and perplexities to any extent, had not his grandmother just then knocked at the door, and told him that tea was ready. Almost at the same moment a bright idea flashed into his mind, like a sunbeam. It suggested that he should go back to Melbourne immediately, and escape all the petty annoyances that were almost driving him distracted. He seized the idea as a drowning sailor grasps an oar, and he exclaimed with suppressed exultation, “ That's a lucky thought, and I

wonder it had not occurred to me before. I can start by the first ship, for I have money to pay my passage this time, and I have a good outfit. It seems rather cruel to leave poor grandmother ; but she won't go with me whatever I offer her, and perhaps she is right. She says she is more happy in this house than she could possibly be elsewhere. Besides, the neighbours did not annoy her much till I came back, so it is plain that I am setting them against her, though I cannot help it. If I go to Melbourne, I shall be able to send her some money every half-year out of my earnings ; but if I stay here her trade will be ruined. I shall be better off abroad, and she will be better off without me, so I'll go as soon as possible." Presently grandmother again rapped at his door, and said that the tea had got cold, but she had put some fresh tea in the pot, so Ben went downstairs instanter. Grandmother remarked, when he sat down at the table, that he looked better than he had at dinner-time ; and he only wanted a cupful of her horehound tea every morning for a week or two, to put him all right again. His blood was a little out of order, that was all.

"Your horehound tea is very good in its way, grandmother ; but it is not exactly what would help me at present. I want to feel that I am living for some useful purpose, and that I am not a mere drone in the great social hive of busy workers."

"But you are not a drone, Ben. Oh dear me, no ! You have always had the character of being a steady, hard-working young man," said grandmother soothingly. "You'll soon get into work again, never fear ; and then you'll be as brisk as ever you were. Ha, ha ! I fancy I can see you as you were years ago, going off to the factory of a morning, whistling like a young bullfinch.

Drone indeed ! nothing of the sort. I am very sure, Ben, that with such a kind heart as you have, you could not possibly have travelled round the world without doing good to somebody that you have met with. Yes, and you will live to do lots more good, so cheer up, my dear boy !”

“I wish I could think so, grandmother,” replied Ben. “I have lately begun to fancy that I am of no use to any one.”

“Ah ! that is nothing but fancy, Ben ; and I hope you won’t indulge it, or it will fret me sorely. Are you not the only earthly comfort and help that I have ? Whatever should I do without you ? But stay, my love, I’ve just thought of something. While the fresh tea is drawing, I will read you some verses that your poor, dear mother was very fond of. She cut them out of the *London Penny Magazine*, and treasured them up, because it was said that they were composed by a servant-girl in Devonshire. She is a clever girl, wherever she lives.”

Grandmother then trotted to her bedroom, and soon returned with a slip of tear-soiled print, which she read with much pathos. I need not hesitate to copy the verses into this page, for they are as simply beautiful as wild spring-flowers in a Devonshire lane.

“THE DEWDROP AND THE STREAM.”

“The brakes with golden flowers were crowned,
And melody was heard around,
When near the scene a dewdrop shed
Its lustre on a violet’s head,
And trembling to the breeze it hung !
The streamlet as it rolled along,
The beauty of the morn confessed,
And thus the sparkling pearl addressed :

“ ‘Sure, little drop, rejoice we may,
For all is beautiful and gay :
Creation wears her emerald dress,
And smiles in all her loveliness.
And with delight and pride I see
That little flower bedewed by thee—
Thy lustre with a gem might vie,
While trembling in its purple eye.’

“ ‘Ay, you may well rejoice, ’tis true,’
Replied the radiant drop of dew ;
‘You will, no doubt, as on you move,
To flocks and herds a blessing prove.
But when the sun ascends on high,
Its beam will draw me towards the sky ;
And I must own my little power—
I’ve but refreshed a humble flower.’

“ ‘Hold !’ cried the stream, ‘nor thus repine—
For well ’tis known a power Divine,
Subservient to His will supreme,
Has made the dewdrop and the stream.
Though small thou art (I that allow),
No mark of Heaven’s contempt art thou—
Thou hast refreshed a humble flower,
And done according to thy power.’

“ ‘All things that are, both great and small,
One glorious Author formed them all ;
This thought may all repinings quell :
Who serves His purpose, serves Him well.’

At Ben’s request Mrs. Bruce shut up her shop at eight o’clock, and then they sat down and spent, as she said, the most comfortable evening they had had together since his return. They chatted about time past with its sorrows and its joys, and about future time and its uncertainties ; they also talked hopefully of their prospects when “there should be time no longer,” and when

all life's toils and troubles would be over. Before Ben retired he kissed his grandmother again and again, in such a loving tender way that she wept for joy; and when she went to her room she again wept for sorrow, for it reminded her of the happy times when his dear mother used to show her all the fondness of her gentle nature.

And Ben went to his bedroom and wept. The idea of leaving his kind old grandmother, perhaps never to see her again, touched his softest feelings; and he was on the point of giving up his emigration scheme, when the sound of noisy brawling in the street startled him, and his old morbid sensations were returning with a rush. So he sat down and wrote a hasty farewell note; then he packed up as many clothes as he could get into a carpet-bag and a valise; and, as the clock in the parlour was striking twelve, he stole softly downstairs past the room of his sleeping relative, and left the house by a side door. He passed out of Back Street unmolested, for all his enemies were in bed. A few hours afterwards, he was riding in an express train on the Great Northern Railway for Liverpool.

The breakfast was getting cold next morning, but Mrs. Bruce was loth to disturb her grandson. She considerably thought that as he was somewhat out of sorts, a little extra sleep might do him good; but when the clock pointed to half-past nine, and he did not come down, she began to feel uneasy. So she went upstairs, and her consternation may be imagined when she found his room empty, and that his bed had not been occupied during the night. On the toilet table was a note addressed to her; she tremblingly opened it, and read as follows:—

“My dearly beloved Grandmother,—You will be

grieved at the purport of this note, but perhaps not more so than I am while writing it. I cannot live in this neighbourhood any longer, and if I never return to it I shall only be sorry on your account. I am going abroad, and I think it will be best for my future advancement. I feel that I am capable of rising in the world a little higher than my present level, but I should never do it in this locality, for here I feel spiritless. I must get amongst strangers again, where I shall not dread being taunted and twitted continually for family blemishes, which it is impossible for me to remedy.

"I expect two ladies to call here to see me to-morrow. Of course you will tell them that I am not at home. I dare not stop to meet them, lest they should see me attacked by the people who sorely abused me a few days ago. When Frank Shorter comes back he will tell you who the ladies are, for he knows as much or more about them than I do. You can tell Frank that I received his letter, but I have not time to reply to it now; perhaps I will write to him before I leave England. In the purse on the table you will find fifty-four pounds, which is exactly half my stock of money. When I earn more I will send you some; and I have a strong hope that I shall be able to support you in comfort, without your keeping a shop. It seems strangely impressed on my mind that there are better times coming for both of us. If I can earn an honest livelihood in peace and quietness, I shall be satisfied. I am going abroad to seek my fortune; I cannot tell where at present, but you shall hear from me soon. Do not allow any hue and cry to be made after me. Be assured that I shall not forget you; and if we never meet again on earth we shall meet in heaven, for I am going to

strive to get there. You have often told me of the 'strait and narrow way': I shall try to walk in it. Farewell, my dear grandmother! Forgive, but do not forget,

"Your loving grandson,

"BEN BRUCE.

"To Mrs. Rachel Bruce."

CHAPTER XXV.

“ If the heart of a man is depressed with cares,
The mist is dispelled when a woman appears.”

—*Gay.*

THE *Great Britain* steamer was loading at Liverpool for Melbourne, and was almost ready for sea. Ben had no difficulty in securing a second-class berth in her, as he had ready money to pay for it.

That was the favourite steamship on the Melbourne line for many years, and her owners must have found her a profitable vessel. Her comfortable qualities were often extolled by her old passengers, and experienced seamen have said that she was one of the driest ships afloat, and that even in a heavy head sea she rarely dipped bows under, as some steamers do at almost every topping wave. That she was a remarkably strong ship was proved by her weathering out a winter on the exposed shores of Dundrum Bay, soon after she was first launched, and also by her successful career for thirty years afterwards; and it has often been a source of wonder, that the model of that good old steamer has not been more generally adopted by modern ship-builders. The writer has travelled in many ocean steamers during the last fifty years, and does not remember more than one ship that had the peculiar flanging bows of the *Great Britain*, which helped her to rise so easily to a head sea. No doubt she was an expensive ship to

build, but "good things are cheapest in the end." Perhaps if that ancient maxim were more carefully studied, we should not so often be shocked at hearing of large cargo steamers foundering at sea, and drowning their crews, and causing weeping and want in many homes on shore.

The *Great Britain* had her usual complement of five hundred passengers, many of whom were in the second class; and as Ben had been to sea before, he was in some measure looked upon as an authority in nautical matters by his fellow-voyagers, few of whom had ever been on shipboard before. The owner of a kind heart is always glad to be a comfort to any one in trouble, and Ben had many opportunities of helping the helpless, especially in seasons of bad weather. There was a young man in his mess, a lawyer's clerk, who said he was taking the voyage for the benefit of his health; but it was plain to every one about him that he was in an advanced stage of consumption, and that he would have been better on shore—at any rate, he ought not to have been allowed to go to sea except as a saloon passenger, and in a separate cabin. Ben had a strong sympathy for the poor fellow, and voluntarily acted as his nurse, but he gradually grew weaker, and during a gale of wind, off the Cape of Good Hope, he died.

In the close intimacy with him which his duty as nurse occasioned, Ben was often shocked at the impatience and the profanity of the suffering man, who had to be carefully watched lest he should jump overboard. Ben several times tried, in his simple way, to talk to him of the need of preparation for death, which was certainly not far off; and he offered to read to him from the Bible, but his offer was repulsed with bitter scoffing and imprecation. Ben was sorely grieved that the book which his late dear mother and his grand-

mother had taught him to prize as God's Holy Word, and the best book in the world, should be spoken against in such condemnatory terms. The man was an avowed disbeliever in revealed religion. He said "he knew the Bible from beginning to end, and at one time he believed in it, but now he hated to hear it named. He belonged to an advanced school of thinkers." The man was evidently pretty well read in modern sceptical literature, and perhaps if he had had breath to spare for the effort, he would have tried to disseminate his infidel opinions among his fellow-passengers.

On the day prior to his death, Ben was much troubled at the idea of a poor mortal going out of the world in his unprepared state, so he knelt beside his berth, opened his Bible again and began to read a part of the New Testament, whereupon the man fiercely vociferated, "So you *will* persist in annoying me with that . . . I can't stop you from reading it, because I haven't strength to get up, but I can stop my ears from hearing your drivel." He then put his fingers in his ears and snarled. Poor Ben shut up his book. That book had been the comfort and solace of his late beloved mother in her lingering illness, and Ben was much shocked at hearing its precious truths blasphemously assailed, and that too by a helpless mortal shivering in the cold embrace of death. The next day the mortal remains of the unhappy man were committed to the deep. It was a solemn event.

On the sixtieth day from home the *Great Britain* anchored in Hobson's Bay. The voyage was considered a speedy one in those days, and no mishap occurred to the ship. But for all that, and notwithstanding Ben had five hundred fellow-passengers to keep him from feeling drowsy, he was glad when the voyage was ended, and he

lost no time in getting on shore. He had had enough of the society of his ship friends, for a while.

On that same night Mrs. and Miss Blake were sitting by the parlour fire in their snug cottage at Carlton. A strong gale of wind was roaring over the chimney-top, and helped to arouse their sympathies for voyagers who were tossing about on the rough sea, but they had no idea that their respected friend, Bruce, was at that time making his way direct to their house. Indeed, neither of them were thinking of him just then ; but they were having a confidential chat about another of Annie's admirers, whom she was not at all friendly disposed to. For a week or so previously, a strange young man had followed her home from her workshop every evening. She had seen his grimaces, which were meant for love signals, but she feigned not to notice him, and never gave him any encouragement. On that evening he had stopped her and offered her a bouquet, which she declined to accept. Like a prudent girl, she told her mother of the circumstance, and they were discussing it, with that mutual confidence which should always exist in such close relationship.

"He is either a very simple young man, or he is something worse," reasoned Mrs. Blake. "If he really loves you, he would have more respect for you than to follow you in the street in that questionable way ; and if he had common-sense, he would take the proper way to pay his addresses to you. You were quite right in declining to accept the flowers from him. Did you ever speak to him, dear ?"

"No, mother, never. Miss Beck knows him. She says he is a clerk in some office in Melbourne, and his father is a respectable man. He lives near Terang. That's all I know of him."

"I think if he were as respectable as his father is said to be, he would behave differently towards a young lady who is a stranger to him ; but perhaps he is a simpleton, and does not know better. At any rate, he is not the kind of lover for you to encourage."

By the flush on her cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes it seemed as if Annie was going to say something cutting about her obtrusive follower, when her mother said, "Hush, dear ! I heard our gate open. Who ever can be coming here at this late hour ?" The next moment there was a rap at the door, and Annie was going to open it, but her mother checked her, for she had a misgiving that it might be some treacherous night prowler ; so she went to the door herself, and before withdrawing the bolt she asked, "Who is there ?"

"It is I, Mrs. Blake," was the answer.

Annie's heart began to palpitate with a peculiar emotion, for she recognised the voice, and at the next instant her mother exclaimed, "Dear me, Mr. Bruce ! is it possible ? Well, well, this is a surprise to be sure ! Come inside out of the cold. I am glad to see you—that I certainly am !"

Ben walked into the parlour, and was kindly received by Miss Blake. If she did not express her feelings so openly as her mother, he knew that she was equally glad to see him, for there was language in her looks, and in the tremor of her little soft hand, which he could understand. After shaking hands with Annie and her mother a second time, Ben said, "*The Great Britain* arrived in the bay a few hours ago, and as I had a chance of getting on shore, in a small steamer, I embraced it, for I thought you would not mind my disturbing you, even at this late hour."

"You are welcome indeed, Mr. Bruce. We are really

glad to see you. Your old bedroom is unoccupied, and it is at your service. It is well aired, and we can soon get it ready for you. Annie, put some sticks on the fire and make a blaze, while I fill the kettle. You want some supper, I am sure, Mr. Bruce. Oh, don't mention the trouble, it's quite a pleasure. Dear me! how well you are looking, after your voyage! You must have made but a short stay in England—I can hardly believe you have been there, but folks can travel fast now-a-days, with steam and wind working together."

The kind old lady then trotted about, in a state of joyful excitement, to prepare Ben something nice for supper, meanwhile asking him a variety of questions about himself and his friend Frank, and all his friends and relations in the old country. There could be no doubt in Ben's mind that he was welcome, so he made himself at home at once; and when the excitement of the ladies toned down a little and supper was ready, he told them all the interesting news he could think of, with the leading incidents of the voyage home and out again, to all of which they listened attentively. But when he told in playful terms of Frank's romantic idea of bringing out a wreath of hops from Mrs. Blake's father's hop-grounds, to hang up in her parlour like a mistletoe bough, her eyes sparkled with pleasure, and her tongue could no longer be restrained from interrupting Ben's narrative with reminiscences of her early days in her dear old home, and the fun she used to have at hop-picking seasons. She then drifted on to a story, which Ben had heard her tell before, how that she and some of her frolicsome girl companions had on one occasion helped to hoist a young city lawyer into the hop-bin, and trowselled him over and over among the new hops, until he was as yellow as a canary bird. How that her

cousin Susanna dusted his coat for him when he got out of the bin, and he fell in love with her. How they were married a year afterwards, at Hopley Church, and went to live in London in grand style. But the strangest coincidence of all was, that the lawyer's name was Hopkins! Mrs. Blake having once started on home topics dear to her heart, which the hop-wreath suggested, she continued her little tales of her girlhood's merry days, until Ben naturally grew drowsy, and the lamp was burning dimly, so they retired to their bedrooms as the clock was striking one.

The next day Ben removed his luggage from the ship to Mrs. Blake's home, and took up his abode in the room he had previously occupied. His stock of cash on hand was £25, and though he knew it would not last very long, it saved him from feeling a similar anxiety for his pecuniary condition to that he felt when he landed in Sydney about twelve months before, with only a few shillings in his pocket. Worry about money matters sadly clogs the internal machinery of a man, as many know by experience. But being comparatively free from that clog, Ben was able to look for employment with calm deliberation and judgment, and was not obliged to take the first job he could get, for the sake of a bare livelihood. In strolling through Flinders Lane one day, about a week after his arrival, he saw a newly erected card-box factory. Manufactures of various kinds were then beginning to be active in Victoria; the progress they have since made there, and in all the Australian colonies, official statistics will show, and it is almost astounding. Though it was not exactly the sort of work Ben had been used to, he could do it, so he applied at the factory and was readily engaged, at the liberal wages of fifty shillings a week; for steady hands

in that line were scarce. Ben was highly pleased at his engagement, and as he walked homeward to tell Mrs. Blake of his good fortune, he mentally calculated his prospective ways and means, and found that he might easily save one pound a week out of his earnings, half of which he resolved to put in the savings bank with his present stock in hand, as a sort of nest-egg, and the other half he would send to his grandmother, in fulfilment of his promise.

Ben now considered himself permanently settled ; so one of his first duties was to write to his grandmother and tell her of his well-being, and assure her that she should receive the half of his savings every year. Mrs. Blake's house was nearly three miles from his factory, still there were social considerations which outweighed the inconvenience of a long walk morning and evening, and he had not a thought of changing his lodgings. He took a sitting in the church of which Mrs. Blake was a member, and he bought a new hymn-book, and determined that he would try to be religious. He honestly confessed to himself, that though he had a great veneration for religion he did not understand much about it, as propounded by some of the learned ministers whom he had occasionally listened to in London, or whose abstruse reasonings on the subject he had read in print. He had promised his grandmother that he would try to live a godly life, but he could not do much in that way on board the *Great Britain*, for there was always so much of the other sort of life to distract his mind from serious thoughts, but now that he could make a fair beginning he meant to do it.

At the end of the first month of his new career in Melbourne, Ben thought he had good cause for self-gratulation. Upon reviewing his position, he found that,

in the first place, his employer had been pleased with his work, and had promised him a rise of wages as trade progressed. He had made some addition to his store of general knowledge, for he had spent some of his spare hours in the Melbourne Free Library, and had joined the School of Design at Carlton ; and he was going to be proposed as a teacher in the Sunday-school attached to ——— Church. Furthermore, he had, in his own humble opinion, made some little progress in religious lore, inasmuch as he had learned three hymns, and a chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon, by heart ; besides, he had said his prayers twice a day as regularly as could be expected. Still, for all that, he was far from being satisfied with his attainments in theological knowledge, and used to fancy that the smallest boy in the Sunday-school knew more than he did, and on that account he looked forward to his appointment as a teacher with misgiving. His enjoyment of the musical services in church on Sundays was almost ecstatic, especially while Annie Blake was singing the solo parts in the anthem, and he thought her voice was the sweetest that ever was heard in a mortal choir. His experience on the whole, moral, social, and domestic, was certainly encouraging to him, and when contrasted with his late disconsolate position in Back Street, Hackney, in his own native air, he was like a pet swan luxuriating in an ornamental lake, compared with a miserable begrimed goose cooped up on board ship, waiting its turn to be cooked for the cabin table.

Annie had made some impression on Ben's susceptible heart before he left for England in the *Monarch*, though he did not say much about it even to his confidential friend, Frank. He had not whispered a word of love to her, nor had he encouraged the tender passion in his own

heart, for he had no fixed idea of returning to Melbourne again, and he was too honourable to trifle with an innocent girl. But he often found himself comparing Annie with girls whom he casually met with in his travels, and the balance was always in her favour, excepting Miss Marshall, who was the most fascinating young lady he had ever seen, and he could not help admiring her almost to adoration; but she was so high above his station, that he never presumed to foster a loving hope in that direction. There were some bright girls on board the *Great Britain*, but not one of them combined amiable disposition with good looks in so pleasing a degree as Annie Blake did. Living in the same house with her, playing a game of chess with her now and then of an evening, listening to her dulcet voice in the church choir on Sundays, and occasionally walking home beside her and her mother, were all minor circumstances which tended to deepen his impressions; in short, by degrees Ben grew passionately in love with Annie, and he resolved to tell her of his love as soon as he could decide on the most delicate and proper way of doing it. His powers of observation, quickened by love, had enabled him to discover that she was not engaged, but the same keen faculty made him feel uneasy about the attitude of the young organist of the church, who always pulled out his softest stops when Annie sang her parts, and as often as he could spare his eyes from his music book, he would gaze at her through his organ looking-glass, as lovingly as a sly fox peering at a prize duck. But he was a very plain man, so Ben was hopeful.

Ben had never read an old-fashioned romance or a modern novel, so he was quite ignorant of the standard methods of love-making, as touchingly described by ex-

perienced pens. But nature is a kind guide to honest hearts. Ben soon made Annie understand his tender feelings towards her, for she was a girl of quick perception and quite free from affectation. His declaration of love was brief, but manly and emphatic, and her reply was as encouraging as he could expect or wish. She confessed her fond attachment to him, and said that if her mother approved of it, she would accept him as her affianced lover. Her mother did not take over long to consider Ben's proposals, and when she gave her assent to them, his happiness was all but complete. His gleeful song as he went to his work next morning was—

“ My Nanie O ! my Nanie O !
My kind and winsome Nanie O !
She holds my heart in love's dear bands,
And nane can do't but Nanie O ! ”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“A man he seems of cheerful yesterdays
And confident to-morrows.”

—*Wordsworth.*

THE current of Ben's life now seemed to glide along as unruffled as a summer streamlet through a flowery meadow. He had regular employment with a master who never grumbled at his workmen, but often gave them a kind encouraging word, and paid them fair wages. Every month Ben was adding to his little fund in the savings bank; and he estimated that about a year thence he would have money enough to furnish a small cottage, and then he might venture to ask his devoted Annie to become his wife. His health and spirits had improved so much that, as he often gleefully remarked to himself, his dear old grandmother would hardly know him if she were to meet him in the street. All his spare time was usefully occupied, and that was another of the hidden springs of his happiness and contentment.

One evening he was hastening towards Smith Street, to attend a musical *soirée* in a schoolroom there. His anticipation of a pleasant evening was heightened by the fact that his charming Annie was to sing, “Consider the lilies, how they grow!” and he believed that she would sing it as near to perfection as any girl in the world ever sang it. The hope too that he would have the

pleasure of escorting her home, after the *soirée* was over, no doubt increased his happy feeling. I am not sure that he felt any joy in the idea that many of the smart young men connected with that choir, besides the organist, envied him his gifted sweetheart; but some young fellows would have felt proud even at being envied in that way. He was walking along at a quicker pace than usual, for he was afraid of losing his chance of getting a good seat, when he was startled by a hail from a well-known voice, and at the same moment he saw his old friend, Frank Shorter, hurrying across the road to meet him. It was a joyful surprise to Ben, and the greeting between the two friends was a cordial one. They were really glad to see each other.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Frank, as he shook Ben's hand for the third time, "I was certain I should find you in this latitude, Ben, and so I told your dear old grandmother when she was fearing you were drowned again. Love has a wonderfully attractive power, polar influence is nothing to it. It laughs at distance and difficulties, and will draw a man anywhere and through anything. Ha, ha! marvellous! But tell me, how is Miss Annie, and how is her mother?"

"They are both quite well, and will be glad to see you, Frank."

"Ay, they were always very kind to me. I am making direct for their house, so you had better come with me unless you have some weighty business on hand, which I should guess you have by the smart way you were stepping out when I first hailed you—going ahead like a postman."

Ben explained where he was going, but added, "I must give up the *soirée*, Frank, for I am anxious to hear all the news you have to tell me. I'll go back with you."

Frank stoutly objected to Ben's giving up his evening's treat, and offered to go with him to the school-room ; but Ben said that he could not enjoy the concert while he was so anxious to hear news from home. So they walked together to Mrs. Blake's cottage, and on the way there Ben learned, first of all, a few particulars about his dear grandmother, which put his mind at rest concerning her, and then he could calmly listen to Frank's story told in his own deliberate way, but of which I must only give a summary. Frank had passed his examination in London and got a mate's certificate ; but being desirous of getting to Melbourne to find Ben, he had declined a good berth in a barque trading to the Baltic (which he was offered through the influence of Mr. Mead) and accepted a second mate's berth on board the steamship *London*, which arrived in Hobson's Bay that morning.

Mrs. Blake was both surprised and pleased to see Frank back ; and Ben was much amused at the varied moods of the excitable old lady, while Frank described his visit to her native village, and his interviews with some of her dear relations and friends ; and he was equally pleased with the patient good nature of Frank in replying to the numberless simple questions she put to him. Although Ben was very desirous of asking him about several important matters affecting their mutual interest, he did not interrupt the colloquy until Mrs. Blake had made all the inquiries she could think of, and then, at Ben's suggestion, Frank went with him to his bedroom to chat over their private affairs.

It appeared, from Frank's statement, that he had stayed at Newby Hall longer than he expected, in consequence of an accident which happened to Mrs. Marshall and her granddaughter. They were going to

London on the day that Frank intended to return, and had got into their carriage to drive to the railway-station, when the horses became restive and the coachman could not control them. They galloped down the avenue of oaks, and brought the carriage into violent contact with one of the lodge gates. The ladies were thrown out, and Mrs. Marshall's legs were broken, and Miss Marshall was severely bruised. They were taken back to the mansion and a surgeon was sent for. Frank remained at the Hall until the doctor said that both ladies were out of danger, and then he returned to London and learnt the startling news of Ben's mysterious disappearance. "So you see, Ben," added Frank, as a wind-up to his budget of exciting news, "I saw and heard of enough mishaps in one week to give me a shaking if I were one of the nervous sort."

"I suppose you found my dear grandmother in sore trouble about me, Frank?"

"I did so, poor old soul! Some of her loving neighbours had been trying to persuade her that you had jumped into the Thames again; and for half an hour after I got to her house she would not be comforted by anything I could say to her; but after awhile she got better. I lodged with her up to the time I joined my ship, and before I left she was as cheerful as a wood-bird, for I had persuaded her that you were in good quarters and well taken care of. I was sure you had gone to Melbourne again, and I told her she would soon hear from you, and that perhaps you would make a fortune in Victoria. That sort of talk roused her up wonderfully, and she said she was glad you were gone away. You were too high-spirited to associate with the people in that street, so you never could have lived in peace there. I believe that too, Ben, from what little I

saw of the manners and customs of the natives ; and I think you are lucky that you got away with a whole scalp, or without being tattooed by finger-nails."

"Grandmother has received my letter by this time, and that will set her mind at rest concerning me. It is indeed fortunate for me that I left London. I am not like the same man that I was when there ; now I am happy and cheerful, and never had better health in my life. Grandmother will be delighted when she hears this, for she is over-anxious for my well-being, and it is only her extreme love for me that makes her at times seem selfish and unreasonable."

"That's just it, Ben ; but when I go back and tell her that you are living with good old Widow Blake, and that you are courting her amiable daughter, grandmother will be as happy and as proud as Annie is herself. She is deeply anxious that you should marry a girl of the right sort, and I can satisfy her on that score."

"I am very sorry for the mishap that Mrs. Marshall and her granddaughter met with," remarked Ben, in a sympathising tone.

"Yes, poor things ! so am I sorry for it ; and I would willingly bear half of their breakages and bruises if it were possible. Both of them were vastly anxious to see you, Ben ; and they were going to London for that very purpose when their coach got capsized."

"I am grieved that I neglected to write and acknowledge Mrs. Marshall's kind letter and the bank draft she sent me ; but the fact is, Frank, I was hardly in my right senses during the time I was in England, and I think I was more fit to have been in a lunatic asylum than elsewhere. I shall never forget the misery I endured in those few weeks."

"You ought to have seen a doctor, Ben ; and I said as much as that to your grandmother. I am not over fond of doctor's handling or their physic either, still I believe there are times when a man should seek proper medical treatment. It might save him no end of suffering. It was your body that was out of trim, not your mind."

"That's true enough, Frank, but I am all alive now. The voyage out helped to put me to rights, and having suitable work to do, and a respectable, quiet home, is very comforting to a fellow of my temperament. Tell me, Frank, was Mrs. Marshall going to London on purpose to see if I had received her letter with a bank draft in it?"

"I shouldn't wonder if she was, Ben, though she didn't say anything to me about it. She was really anxious to see you, I am sure of that."

"Did you tell her that my grandmother was living in London?"

"No, I did not, mate ; for I wasn't going to see you caught out in a lie through anything I said. I didn't say your relatives lived in Australia neither, so I've got a clear conscience on that score. I told her that we both lodged with an old widow lady, at No. 80, Back Street, Hackney, and as she didn't ask me the widow's name, I didn't tell it. I thought she would find that out soon enough when she went there. But you ought to write to her, Ben, and tell her you got the money all right. It would be only common manners and proper respect. She is certainly the kindest lady, of a high class, that I ever had the rare luck to meet with. All her servants seem to be real fond of her, and that's a good sign, you know."

"I am ashamed of myself for neglecting to write to

the lady ; but it is never too late to do what is right and proper. I will write her by next mail. Now don't say any more about it, Frank, for it is making me feel nervous again. Let us talk of something lively. By the way, how well you are looking ! I ought to have paid you that compliment before."

"I am well and hearty, I am thankful to say. Ay, I know what you mean by that solemn peep into my eyes, mate. They look sober, don't they?"

"Yes, they do, Frank ; and I need not ask if you have kept your temperance flag hoisted, for I am sure you have. I knew that at the first glance I got of you to-night, when you hailed me across the road."

"You are right, my friend. I have stuck to my colours like a true man-o'-war's man. Not a sip of strong stuff has entered my lips since you have known me. I shall always deem it a lucky turn in my life's course when I fell in with you as a shipmate, for you have done more to keep me on the sober tack than any man I ever met with before. I know it will please you to hear me say that I have thoroughly conquered the 'drinking devil,' as they call him—regularly got him under my heels, and with the help of God I will keep him there. If you like to listen to it, I will tell you how I was cured of my awful thirst for grog. Drugs ? Oh no, mate, not at all—I'll tell you directly. By the way, I once saw an advertisement, in a London newspaper, of a doctor offering to cure any drunkard with a few doses of some stuff he had prepared. Good luck to him ! say I, whoever he may be. Any drug that will help to cure a poor drunkard is worth a blessing. But I know of a way ten thousand times surer than any doctor's physic in the world. I wish I could tell my sure remedy to all the poor, unhappy drunkards in this

land, or all the world over, and help them to kick off their shackles and be free men, as I am this moment."

Ben had never heard his old friend so eloquent before. He said a few encouraging words to him, and then Frank began to tell how he had conquered his long indulged and almost insatiate thirst for strong drink. I will give it in a separate chapter, so it can be skipped by readers who do not care for such a subject ; but I would earnestly advise any one who is tied and bound by the chain of the "drinking devil," to read honest Frank Shorter's short and simple narrative—and to follow his example.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Frank Shorter's simple story that he wished every sailor in the world could hear.

"YOU know, Ben, before we left Melbourne I gave you my word of honour that I would not taste grog for half a year. I kept my promise faithfully. I would have suffered death sooner than break it; but I made up my mind to have a short spree, just to treat virtue, directly my six months was up. You had left England, so I had not got you alongside of me to grip hold of my arm in the nick of time, and drag me from my drinking purpose, as you did some time before in Melbourne. You remember the time I mean?"

"But surely, Frank, your own sober common-sense must have warned you that you were going to commit an act of extreme folly!" interposed Ben, with a look of amazement.

"Ay, you wonder that it did not; but I have told you before that bare common-sense doesn't often help a man who is beset, body and brains, by a fiendish craving for drink. You can't understand it. No, that you can't, Ben, and I don't want you to. Now listen; and please don't stop me again if you can help it, or I may leave some of the best threads out of my yarn. On the evening that my time was up, I was taking a stiff lesson in trigonometry from my kind tutor, Captain

Harden, and when it was over I said cheerily, 'Now, skipper, I am going to stand treat to-night, for I am a free man when the clock strikes nine.' You can't move out-of-doors with your crippled feet to go to the tavern, so I'll fetch home a gallon of rum, and we'll have a jolly night of it. You may invite your son and your brother-in-law to join us, if you like. I'll pay for everything. You have had lots of patience with me, captain, and have got me forward much faster than I expected, so now we'll have a spree together on the strength of it.' My eye, Ben, how the old man did stare at me! I shall never forget his scared look. He seemed quite taken aback. Presently he said, in his quiet way, 'I am much obliged to you, Shorter, for I know you mean kindly; but I have not tasted grog for twenty years, and I never mean to touch it again while I breathe. A thousand sovereigns would not tempt me to taste a single dram.' 'Hi, hi! you are an out-and-out temperance man, captain. I didn't know that before,' said I. So he up and told me a dismal yarn, how that when he was mate of a collier brig out of North Shields, he was drunk on his watch one night, and ran down a Dutch schooner and drowned all hands, except the cabin-boy. He got out of the scrape all right as far as the law went, for all his crew swore he was sober, and that the weather was foggy, though the cabin-boy swore it was quite clear. But he could not get freed by his own conscience, and the ghosts of the seven Dutch sailors used to haunt him every time he got drunk—or he fancied they did, which was all the same to him. To get rid of the ghosts, he made up his mind to give up grog entirely. He solemnly vowed against it, but broke his oath in three days. Then he swore again, and said if he touched grog for six months he would chop his little fingers off.

He broke that vow in a fortnight, but he hadn't the heart to chop his fingers off. Some time after that he swore a third time, a horrible oath, and said if he broke it he wished God would send him to hell that minute. He thought that would certainly scare him off the grog ; but it didn't, for in less than a month he broke that shocking vow, and was blind-drunk for ten days. Then *delirium tremens* set in, as they usually do after such a bout as that, and he cut his throat, but not quite deep enough to kill himself. He was carried to the London Hospital, and there he lay for three months. During that time a City missionary went to see him very often, and he soon showed him the right way to conquer the drinking devil that was in his heart ; and from that time John Harden has never let grog pass through his lips."

"What plan did he take to cure the terrible habit so thoroughly?" asked Ben, who was much interested in Frank's recital.

"I am going to tell you, Ben. The City missionary found out all about poor Harden's ups and downs, and his vain attempts to cure his grog-thirstiness by cursing his own body and soul ; so one day he said to him very kindly, 'Captain Harden, it is no use your trying to conquer the drinking fiend by your own efforts, or in your own strength. An infant might as well try to grapple with a lion or a tiger. Of your own self you can do nothing.' 'I know it, sir,' said poor Harden, weeping, for he was completely knocked down. 'I feel that I am quite helpless.' 'There is only one way that you can conquer the foe ; shall I tell it you?' said the missionary. 'Oh yes, sir, pray do, for I am among the breakers of ruin. I am a wretched, doomed man ; but if there is any channel for me to get out by, do pray show it me !'

"Then the missionary produced his pocket Bible and read a lot of comforting words. I cannot remember them all, but part of what he read was about Jesus Christ putting out His hand and catching hold of poor Peter, the fisherman, as he was sinking in the sea. 'Oh I wish Christ would stretch out His hand and save me, for I am sinking into hell,' cried Harden, who seemed to be getting more wretched than ever. 'Well, ask Him to do it,' said the missionary. 'How shall I ask Him, sir? I have never prayed since I was a little boy.' 'Begin to pray now, captain. "Ask, and ye shall receive:" those are Christ's own words. See, here they are written in His New Testament. Prove them, and see if they are not faithful and true. Kneel down with me now.'

"So Harden went down upon his knees and prayed like a poor sailor overboard crying out for a life-buoy. He asked for pardon for all his past sins, and for strength to resist sin in the future; but especially he prayed for help to resist the awful besetment of drunkenness. His words weren't put together like a prayer-book, but he was in real earnest—that was the main thing. And the missionary, who knelt alongside of him, looked as glad as if he had saved a whole ship's crew from drowning. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' said the missionary, with his finger pointing to that text in the Testament. 'I do believe that Christ will save me!' shouted the captain; and just then a load of misery, as heavy as a chain cable, seemed to uncoil from his heart, and he felt as happy as a saint. 'From that blessed minute to the present time,' said the captain to me, 'I have never tasted grog in any shape. That's the way I conquered the drinking fiend; and depend upon it, Mr. Shorter, there is no other sure

way to do it. Nothing but God's grace will enable mortal man to overcome the love of strong drink.' 'It seems wonderful to me, Captain Harden,' said I, 'that you haven't a fierce craving for a lot of grog, now and then, as I have—a sort of feeling as if some devilish influence was clawing at your vitals, and would not be easy till you got drunk.' 'I understand the sort of feeling you try to describe, Mr. Shorter,' said Harden. 'I have felt it often and often, but it has never mastered me again, because I have always resisted the temptation by prayer. I keep a close watch over myself, for I know if I were to take even one sip of intoxicating liquor I should be floored again. If I am alone when the horrible craving comes on me, as it does sometimes, I pray aloud for help ; but if any one is near who would perhaps be inclined to mock me, I merely say in the softest whisper—or say it mentally—Jesus help me *now*! and I receive strength to stand against the tempter's influence immediately. I ask in faith. Yes, faith in Christ is my sheet anchor, Frank,' said poor old Harden, wiping his eyes. 'I know it will hold me in the hardest gale that can blow over me in life's treacherous roadstead, and it will sustain me when I am surrounded by the surging rollers of death.'

"That was the captain's story, Ben, and it was a happy thing for me that I heard him tell it," continued Frank, with earnestness. "Poor old Harden! with his frost-bitten toes and his poverty, but for all that looking as glad as a bishop. I shall never forget him. He taught me the way to navigate a ship ; but better far than that, he showed me the plain way to heaven. I went to the same source of help and strength that he did, and just in the same way, and with the same happy result, though I had to pray a good deal longer than he

did, for I had not so much simple faith as he had. We are not all alike in any way, and our religious experience differs. Now I am really a free man, Ben. But I don't stand up in my own strength,—no, no, far from it. I wouldn't trust myself for a single moment. Of myself I can do nothing ; but I have an Almighty Friend, always close at hand when I call upon Him, and I know I am safe so long as I trust wholly and solely in Him. I solemnly promised that, if God would give me the power to abstain, I would never again taste strong drink, which had been the curse of my life. I have looked to the right source of help against all the assaults of the devil, and I have received it from day to day. I could now stand on the deck of a sinking ship, free from the fear of sinking into hell (if I could not wholly conquer a natural dread of the cold waters of death), because I have a firm trust in Christ as my Saviour. I heartily wish every sailor, ay, and every landsman in the world, could say as much as that. I have told this story to you, Ben, in my own simple way, and I have no fear that you will call it 'cant,' as some folks might do, for you know very well there is no sham about your old shipmate, Frank Shorter."

"Still nigh me, O my Saviour, stand,
And guard in fierce temptation's hour ;
Hide in the hollow of Thy hand,
Show forth in me Thy saving power.
Still be Thy arms my sure defence,
Nor earth nor hell shall pluck me thence."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“Men my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something new.”

—*Tennyson.*

BEN was so much interested in Frank's story that he lay awake for several hours thinking of it after he went to bed, consequently he slept beyond his usual hour the next morning ; and for the first time since he had been in his new service, he did not go from home till after breakfast. On his way to the city he was pondering over the happy change in Frank's condition and prospects, and wishing he could feel the sustaining peace in his heart, which his old friend had spoken of with such calm, reverential feeling. It was nine o'clock when he turned into Flinders Lane. The porters in the wholesale warehouses were opening the doors and shutters, and the junior clerks were hurrying to their respective offices as usual. Ben did not notice anything uncommon in the appearance of the lane until he arrived near his own workshop, when a peculiar stench and a slight smoke told him that it was partially burnt out. It appeared that an alarm of fire was raised at about three o'clock a.m. The fire brigade from Collins Street were promptly on the spot, with two reels of hose : hydrants were screwed on, and the Yan Yean being in good pressure a force of water was brought to

bear on the burning factory, which soon subdued the flames, though not before most of the light stock was destroyed, and the roof of the building was burnt off. There were no fire engines, for they were not needed; the pressure from the hydrants would have sent a stream of water over the highest warehouse in Flinders Lane. Perhaps few cities have more efficient means for extinguishing a fire than Melbourne has, and the fire brigade are as smart and daring as man-of-war sailors. The same compliment may be justly paid to the fire brigade of Sydney. At the present time the water supply there is not so abundant as it should be; but that will soon be remedied, and a few years hence Sydney will perhaps be as well supplied with water as any city in the world. Over a million sterling is now being expended on works for bringing water into Sydney.

Ben was out of work again. His former calculations on his earnings for the current year looked all wrong, and his cherished hope of settling down in his own little cottage home faded into distance. Still his spirits were good, and he tried to take solace in the reflection that he was better off, under present circumstances, than several of his fellow-workmen were, who had homes of their own and families to support. His employer said he hoped to have the factory going again in a few weeks; so Ben determined that he would in the meantime visit some of the goldfields of Victoria, of which he had heard and read so much. He would gladly have had the company of his friend Frank, but he could not leave his ship. Ben's arrangements were soon completed, and that afternoon he started by steamboat for Geelong. After a short stay there he went on by railway to Ballarat, where he stayed three days. He might have

found ample amusement if he could have stayed there for three weeks. Through the courtesy of several mining managers, he was allowed to go down some of the most famous deep sinkings, and he saw enough to convince him that there was less romance in gold-digging than he had previously imagined. He did not kick against a single gold nugget even as small as a kidney potato, nor did he see much glitter of gold, though he was taken through many tunnels or cuttings in the auriferous quartz; and although there were hundreds of workmen underground, they were all as soberly at work with picks and shovels as colliers or railway navvies—in fact, he did not see one man who came at all up to the idea he had formed of a “jolly digger,” as described by lively writers on the early history of the goldfields of Australia. He did not even smell any roast geese or turkeys, and not a single digger asked him to drink champagne out of a tin pot. From Ballarat Ben went on to Dalesford, and thence to Glenlyon. There he was detained for two days by wet weather, and was unable to visit the Mount Franklin diggings as he had intended to do. He was about to go to Guildford by the early coach which started from the inn where he was staying, when, to his surprise, he was accosted by Mr. Sharp, the confidential clerk of Mr. Blackstone.

“I have found you at last, Mr. Bruce, after three days’ hunting for you,” said Mr. Sharp, who looked as if he had had a fagging chase after something. “I have a message for you from Mr. Blackstone. He is very anxious to see you, and respectfully requests that you will return with me to Melbourne with as little delay as possible.”

“What can Mr. Blackstone want with me so urgently?” Ben asked, with a trepidation which many other honest

men have shown on receiving a sudden message from a lawyer.

"I am not at liberty to explain Mr. Blackstone's business with you, sir; but you may be sure he wants to see you, or he would not have sent me out of the office at our busiest time of the year to search for you. It hasn't been like a holiday trip to me this time, because I have been in such a hurry over it."

"I intend to go to Castlemaine and Sandhurst, and shall perhaps return to Melbourne on Saturday evening," said Ben with affected calmness.

"Then you could not see Mr. Blackstone till Monday, and the English mail will leave on Sunday. I particularly request that you will return with me this morning Mr. Bruce."

Ben's uneasiness increased, as he tried to surmise the object of Mr. Blackstone in sending a special messenger after him. Had his sudden departure from Melbourne on the day after the fire at the factory given rise to any damaging suspicions? But he dismissed that idea in an instant—he surely could not be suspected of arson! Only a madman would be guilty of burning his own bread cupboard. Besides, Mr. Blackstone would not be so politely anxious about such a matter as that. After cogitating over some other suggestions of his own excited fancy, with no satisfactory result, Ben said to Mr. Sharp, "Can you give me some little explanation of Mr. Blackstone's object in sending you after me? A mere hint might relieve the unpleasant suspense I am now feeling."

"All that I dare tell you, sir, is that Mr. Blackstone received by last mail a private communication from Mrs. Marshall, of Newby Hall, and he sent me off to your lodgings at Carlton to tell you that he wished to see

you immediately. As you were not at home, I was instructed to search till I found you, and to make haste over it."

"Oho! that's it, is it? Yes, yes; now I understand it all, Mr. Sharp, and I can explain everything in a few words," said Ben with much excitement, for he concluded that the purport of Mrs. Marshall's communication was about the bank draft which he had omitted to acknowledge. He gave a clear explanation of the affair to Mr. Sharp, and asked him to tell it all to his employer.

"Your statement is as clear as logic itself to me, Mr. Bruce; but I wish you to come with me to see Mr. Blackstone. To tell you the truth, I don't like to go back without you, for I may lose my billet. My governor gets cross if his clerks don't do just what he wishes them to do."

After a little more consideration, Ben concluded that he could not expect much pleasure in his contemplated tour to Bendigo and other famous diggings, with his mind in a state of perplexing suspense, and especially if Mr. Sharp meant to follow him about like a detective officer, so he decided to return to Melbourne forthwith. Mr. Sharp said he had instructions to pay all expenses. Ben did not object to that uncommon proposition. They hired a conveyance to Kyneton, and then took the afternoon train for Melbourne. Mr. Sharp was very pressing for Ben to go to Mr. Blackstone's private house, as it was past office hours, but Ben positively declined; he promised, however, that he would call at the office at ten o'clock next day.

Punctually to time Ben entered Mr. Blackstone's office on the following morning, and was received with marked courtesy. After complimenting him on his healthy

appearance, Mr. Blackstone remarked, "I have lately received a communication from Mrs. Marshall, and I wish to confer with you thereupon, Mr. Bruce."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Sharp told me as much, and I have explained to him the particulars of that unfortunate omission of mine. I regret it very much, because——"

"Pardon me, my dear sir, for interrupting you, but that is not the purport of Mrs. Marshall's advices to me—in fact, she did not mention that little circumstance. Mrs. Marshall is very desirous of seeing you for certain private reasons which she will explain to you personally. At the date of the letter she was confined to her bed, with severe injuries caused by an accident, and it was doubtful if she would recover. She had learned with much regret that you had left England; and having some reason for believing that you were in this city, she sent me instructions to search for you, and to prevail upon you to return to England without delay."

"That is impossible, sir," said Ben emphatically.

"How so, may I ask, Mr. Bruce?"

"In the first place, sir, I have a promise of permanent employment in Melbourne, which I am not willing to lose; and there are other considerations of a domestic nature which induce me to stay here. Besides, I have not the means of paying my travelling expenses to England if I wished to go."

"I have an authority from Mrs. Marshall to supply you with necessary funds, Mr. Bruce. In short, I may as well tell you that I have a letter of credit on Messrs. Coutts & Co.'s bank for £500, which is at your service, provided you agree to start for England at once."

Ben opened his eyes very wide at that unexpected announcement, and asked with unfeigned surprise, "What in the world can Mrs. Marshall want me for, sir?"

"That I cannot tell you," replied Mr. Blackstone, with a kind fatherly smile. "But it is clear to me that she is very anxious to see you. I think it is likely she may wish to ask you some important questions respecting her unfortunate son. Really, Mr. Bruce, I must say I wonder that you should hesitate in going to see a lady who is so very liberally inclined towards you."

"I hope you will forgive me for asking the question, sir; but do you think, from the character of Mrs. Marshall's letter to you, that she is quite rational—or, that is to say, is she in her right senses?"

"Undoubtedly, sir. No question of the fact. Sane as I am. You are naturally enough excited at this disclosure; but if you will allow me to offer you a little calm advice, I would suggest that you start for England by the overland route, a nice pleasant trip that I should like to take myself. The mail steamer will leave this port the day after to-morrow. Get ready to go in her, sir. Anything that I can do for you in the meantime, I will do it with pleasure."

"Oh, I cannot go so soon as that," said Ben, and the idea of leaving his beloved Annie seemed to rise up as a positive barrier to his going at any time. "Will you please to give me a few hours to think over this important matter, Mr. Blackstone? I must consult some of my friends before I can decide."

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Bruce. By all means consult your friends. I don't wish you to act with undue precipitancy. Suppose you call here again at three o'clock this afternoon. Or I will wait on you at your home, if more convenient to you."

"I should not like to trouble you to call on me, sir; I will be here again by the time you appoint," said Ben, and he rose to go.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Bruce, I was almost forgetting to ask you—can you give me any particulars of your parentage? I mean, can you furnish me with a copy of the baptismal register of your father or mother?"

"No, I cannot, sir," replied Ben, somewhat haughtily. "And I do not see what use such documents could be to you or to Mrs. Marshall, even if I could supply them. Excuse me for speaking plainly, sir."

"It was a mere precautionary measure on my part to insure identity; but perhaps it is unnecessary. I am convinced that you are the gentleman I am instructed to treat with. Yes, it is all right, Mr. Bruce. I shall expect you at three o'clock this afternoon. Good-morning, sir."

Ben left the office in a state of nervous tumult. He hired a cab and told the driver to take him to Carlton as quickly as possible. But when about half-way there he bade the man drive to the Flinders Street railway-station. There he took the train for Sandridge, and went directly on board the steamship *London* to consult with his friend, Frank Shorter. It fortunately happened that he was not busy, so he took Ben into a little cabin on deck, and there listened with astonishment to his exciting disclosure.

"This is a strange affair, Frank, and I cannot make it out at all. The more I think over it the more puzzled I get," remarked Ben, when he had given Frank the particulars as far as he knew them himself.

"It certainly is puzzling, looking at it in one way, Ben, because we don't hear above once in a blue moon of anybody being so generous as that dear old lady has been to us two poor fellows. But it's plain enough to me that she is very fond of you, and I dare say she is going to give you something handsome for your services

to her rattle-brained son. Maybe she is going to adopt you. We have heard of such whims in rich old ladies before now. Her butler told me that she has more money than she knows what to do with, and no doubt she means to ask you to spend some of it for her. What are you going to do?"

"I can't make up my mind yet, Frank. I have come down here on purpose to ask your advice. What do you say?"

"Why, go and see the old lady, to be sure. That's your course as plain as any compass could show it. The five hundred pounds she has sent out for you will pay your expenses home and out again, and still leave you twice as much as you could earn at box-making in that time, even if she doesn't give you any more. I wish I had such a chance, Ben; I'd be off double quick, like a runaway rogue."

"Mr. Blackstone wants me to start by the mail steamer on Sunday next."

"Hi, hi! he's in a rare flurry to get quit of you, and that's puzzling to me; but there's no fathoming a lawyer's depth. It looks almost as if you were a good-for-nothing customer after all, or not worth keeping. But what will Annie and her mother say to it, eh, mate? I guess the poor girl won't wish to start you off in such a tremendous hurry."

"That is what I am most concerned about. Heigho! I wish I could get married, and take Annie with me."

"Ah, that would be nice, wouldn't it? You could have honeymoon all the way home. We brought a young married couple out with us in the *London* this trip, and it was quite animating to all hands to notice how the happy pair enjoyed the voyage, with nothing to do but to love one another. Ha, ha! They'll never

have such a jolly time of it again, I'll warrant; for they are going to one of the cannibal islands in the South Sea as missionaries. But I say, Ben, it strikes me if Annie knew as much as I do of that handsome damsel at Newby Hall, she wouldn't like you to go home single lest she should lose you altogether. You must take care of your heart if you go alone, or it will be caught like a bird on a limed cherry-tree."

"No fear of that, Frank. I am under an engagement to Annie Blake, and that is almost as binding with me as matrimony. Besides, Edith Marshall is ever so many grades above my social level. I admire her, not only for her beauty but for her kindly manners; but I would almost as soon hope of possessing the famous Koh-i-noor diamond as think of ever calling Miss Marshall my wife. I am not so ambitious as you suppose."

"You wouldn't be the first smart young fellow of humble degree who married a grand lady. But don't look so grim over it, mate, I was only a joking a bit. It is right that an engagement between two lovers should be sacredly kept, though it is often broken by fellows who have no manly feeling. But I have no fear of you doing anything that isn't above-board and straightforward. You'll have to go home again, Ben, so we needn't argue any more on that score, and I don't see why you shouldn't go in this ship. She will sail in about twelve days. We should have plenty of time to talk together on the voyage. What do you say?"

"A capital idea, Frank. Nothing will please me better, if Mr. Blackstone is willing that I should wait so long. This is a good ship, I suppose?"

"Yes, she is good enough for cabin passengers, and you can afford to go first class now; but she isn't a comfortable ship for the hands forward, nor for passen-

gers in the steerage. Too wet, Ben, that's the most fault I find with her. She is a first-class ship and well officered, though I say it myself."

A somewhat lengthy discussion ensued, which it is unnecessary to report. When Ben left the ship he went straightway to Mr. Blackstone's office, and told him that he had almost decided to go to England in the *London*. The lawyer used his best logic to induce Ben to go in the mail steamer, but without effect, so he at length acquiesced in the plan; and then told Ben that he was at liberty to draw the £500, or any part of it, whenever he chose, upon signing an acknowledgment for the same.

That evening there was a tender scene between Ben and Annie. The unexpected news of his speedy departure from the colony was a shock to her, which she did not strive to conceal. Her affection for him had been of a modest, undemonstrative kind, though not less deep; but the prospect of so soon parting with him was a test which proved to Ben the warmth of her attachment. He tenderly proposed that she should accompany him as his wife, but she gave such sensible reasons why she could not do so that he ceased to press it, and they again mutually exchanged vows of unswerving fidelity, and agreed to correspond by each mail.

Mrs. Blake was also much concerned at Ben's contemplated departure. She had heard a good deal from Frank of Mrs. Marshall's kindness of disposition, and she argued therefrom that she was desirous of showing her gratitude to Ben for his attention to her misguided son. "It is exactly what I should do myself," reasoned Mrs. Blake; "if I were rich, and any one who was poor had shown kindness to a child of mine, I would reward him liberally." Of course Mrs. Blake had seen more of the

world than her daughter had, and she knew the dangerous influence which money exerts on some minds ; and her maternal fears suggested that if Ben got even moderately rich, he might look for a wife more accomplished and of higher rank than her poor Annie. Those and other natural fears disturbed her mind, but she did not even whisper them to Annie, whose confidence in her lover was as firm as her faith in her devoted mother's love.

A fortnight's holiday to a girl who has been for many months closely engaged in a shop or workroom, is a boon the bare prospect of which might make a weary heart bound with new hope and spirit. A lady, who lived in a pleasant inland county of England, used to invite a party of respectable girls, as many as she could nicely accommodate—from London shops, to spend a few weeks in the summer season at her comfortable home in the country. She generously provided them with return railway tickets, and paid all other incidental expenses of their outing, and it was an outing in reality, for they did not spend much of their time indoors, and they were all as merry as singing birds. When their holiday term expired the lady drove her young guests to the railway-station, and slipped a sovereign into the hand of each one as she bade her adieu. The girls usually left with eyes overflowing with tears of mingled gratitude to their kind hostess, and regret that their happy country tour was over. That good lady was doubtless repaid for her kindness, by the consciousness of having ministered to the enjoyment of those hard-worked girls, and they would ever remember her hospitality with loving thankfulness.

Holiday vacations are perhaps not so rare to shop girls in Australia as they are to the same class in England, for in general girls in the former place earn higher

wages, and are thus better able to afford an occasional outing ; besides, the public holidays are more frequent in Melbourne and Sydney than they are in London. A holiday was not so rare a treat to Annie Blake as it was to many other shop-girls even in Melbourne, for her mistress was more than commonly considerate for the health of her young employées, and no doubt she found that it was sound policy to give them an airing pretty often, and thus keep them in working condition. If that good feeling were general it would save a vast amount of suffering.

But the holiday that Annie got for the fortnight prior to Ben's departure from Victoria, was indeed an extraordinary one to her, and it was an equally rare treat for Ben. He had never had such a treat before in his life's experience. To have a season of thorough leisure with plenty of money to spend, and above all to have as companion and sharer of his holiday pleasures the girl of his heart, his darling Annie, was almost more than he could have dared to dream of a few weeks before. Each day they were out together. Sometimes they were accompanied by Mrs. Blake, but oftener they went by themselves, which was nicer. Their quiet rambles in the Botanic Gardens, their boating trips on the charming Yarra Yarra, their visits to the Academy of Arts, and other places of intellectual refreshment and healthful recreation, were all joys which were long remembered with feelings of the tenderest kind.

I might fill a chapter or two with the loving experiences of Ben and Annie for that memorable fortnight ; but I think I may as well leave that part of my story unwritten, for old readers might not enjoy it much, and most of my young readers can imagine it all, more tenderly and naturally than I could describe it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Homeward bound !

BEN was leaning against the ensign-staff abaft the wheel of the steamship *London*, in Hobson's Bay, and was intently watching a ferry-boat that was sailing towards the landing stairs at Sandridge pier. Ever and anon a white handkerchief fluttered from the stern sheets of the boat, which love signal Ben often returned. The boat contained Annie Blake and her mother, who had left the ship after taking a last adieu of their departing friends, Ben and Frank. All the crew of the *London* were active, for it was a busy time ; the anchor was just off the ground, and the order to "Turn ahead quite slow," had been signalled down to the engine-room. Frank Shorter was at his post of duty on the forecastle ; but he stole time enough to cast a glance now and then at the retreating ferry-boat, and if he brushed a tear or two from his eyelids, the act did not detract from his efficiency as a seaman and an officer. Thousands of brave sailors, and soldiers also, have dropped tears at the sight of retreating boats, which carried beloved wives, or sweethearts, or mothers on shore, after bidding tender farewells. It is natural.

Though it was a secret to every one but himself, it was nevertheless a fact that Frank loved Widow Blake. He would have told her the state of his heart before he

left the country, if his circumstances had been more encouraging ; but he reasoned that if he, with merely a second mate's pay, and not much of a reserve fund, were to propose marriage to a woman with a comfortable house of her own and other belongings, he might be suspected of selfishly looking out for a nice warm berth for himself, as skulking sailors often do. So Frank kept the secret of his love in his own breast, and resolved that he would try for a master's certificate on his arrival at London, and if he got it he would return to Melbourne as soon as possible, and look out for a master's berth in the intercolonial trade, and then he would make Mrs. Blake an offer of his hand and heart. She was the kindest and best woman he had known since he left his dear mother's arms, and it was the only time in his life that he had ever seriously encouraged a hope that there was a wife born for him—a thriftless tippling old sailor.

As Annie and her mother returned to Carlton, they were each silently engaged with their own reflections. Mrs. Blake could not overcome an anxiety she felt lest Ben should in his improved circumstances forget or ignore his humble friends in Melbourne ; and she would rather that he had continued to be dependent on his own handicraft for a livelihood than hear of his possessing a fortune. Annie was sad at parting with her lover, which was natural enough, but she was not troubled with any misgivings about his fidelity to her. Of course she did not know so much about the deceitfulness of mankind in general as her mother did, nor did she want to know it ; she believed that Ben's love for her was as pure as the gem which sparkled in the ring that he had placed on her finger, in token of their mutual engagement and of his undying constancy. A little jealousy of Miss Marshall did for a moment try to enter her

mind, but she expelled it at once as dishonouring to the man who had so passionately told her that his heart was entirely her own. Mrs. Blake had a kind regard for Frank, for rough as his exterior was, she could not but observe that he had a depth of moral principle, and a more than ordinary share of common-sense or practical wisdom ; but she had no idea that he cherished matrimonial longings for her, he had never given her any cause to suppose such a thing, and his manner towards her had always been respectfully reserved. She returned to her cottage with her sad-hearted daughter, and there I will leave them to their reflections and their home duties, while I follow the course of Ben and Frank. I have no idea of giving the monotonous particulars of their voyage, but I must mention one incident, which was too important an event in Ben's history to be omitted in my story.

One night, when nearing the equator, the *London* was sailing along with a fresh breeze. Ben had been walking the deck with Frank, talking pleasantly about past events, and speculating a little on their future prospects. The ship was under a press of canvas, and was speeding along faster than Ben had ever sailed before. When the third officer relieved the watch at midnight, Frank told him to keep a sharp look-out for squalls, for the wind was veering a little, and the weather looked rather threatening. Ben then retired to his cabin and turned into his berth. At about four bells he was aroused by the flapping of sails and shouts of the officer on deck, and he soon found by the altered list of the ship that she was taken aback in a hard squall. He sprang out of bed, for he was always ready on an emergency to lend a helping hand on deck (although he was then a cabin passenger), but before he had half dressed himself the

ship was hove nearly on her beam ends, and the movable articles in his cabin were tumbling and crashing all around him. He seized the handle of his cabin-door, but to his dismay he could not open it—owing to the straining of the ship the door had become tightly jammed. The roaring of the wind and rushing of water down the main hatchway filled him with terror, for he thought the ship was sinking. Again he tugged with frantic energy at the cabin-door, but it was as fast as if bolted and barred. Death seemed to stare him in the face more closely than it had ever done before, and there seemed to be no possibility of escape. In distress of mind, such as no one can describe, he fell on his knees and prayed to God to save him. Many an infidel scoffer, whose life has been one round of sinful folly, has uttered an agonizing prayer to God for help, when the prospect of sudden death has aroused his guilty fears. A few minutes afterwards the ship partially righted, for she was falling off before the wind. Ben again pulled violently at his cabin-door, when it flew open and he fell backwards and struck his head against his sea-chest. He was stunned by the blow, and there he lay on the deck until the state-room steward came and helped him into his berth. Although not seriously hurt, he was advised by the doctor to keep below all the next day.

But the impression made on his mind by the accident was not so soon forgotten as the physical pain resulting from it. In the quietude of his cabin (it was Sunday, and a bright calm day), he reflected on the extreme folly of living unprepared for the awful change which death inevitably brings to a man, and he humbly resolved—in reliance on Divine help—that he would thenceforward live a life of faith in Christ, so that should death again suddenly stare him in the face, it

would not bring such overwhelming terrors as he felt at that awful time, when he thought he was going down to the depths of the sea shut up in his cabin, and that in a few minutes he would be in the presence of an unreconciled God. That was the most important turning-point in Ben's life. On that still sabbath night he and his good friend Frank had a solemn religious service in his cabin, and they gave thanks together to the "Father of all mercies" for the comforting assurance they each felt that their sins were all pardoned, and that if the ship should go down under them before the morning light, they would enter upon a glorious immortality in the realm where "there shall be no more sea." In the truest and happiest sense of the phrase, they were "*homeward bound*."

CHAPTER XXX.

“Some feelings are to mortals given,
With less of earth in them than heaven.”

—*Scott.*

THE *London* made a fair passage, and a little more than two months after leaving Melbourne she was steaming up the English Channel. Ben and Frank had ample time on the voyage to discuss their plans, and to arrange them with cool judgment. It was agreed that Ben should go direct to Newby Hall when he landed, and Frank should get on shore as soon as he could, and go and tell Mrs. Bruce of her grandson's return, but not to explain to her his motive for returning so suddenly. Ben would fain have gone to see his grandmother before he went elsewhere, but he dreaded a scene with some of her neighbours, who might still be disposed to carry out their threat to punish him in their spiteful way. Besides, he had promised Mr. Blackstone that he would see Mrs. Marshall as soon as possible, and he was naturally enough impatient to know what her object was in sending for him so urgently. It was late in the evening when he left the ship, so he went in a cab to the Great Northern Hotel, to be in readiness to start by the early train for S——. On his way to the hotel he posted a letter to his grandmother, apprising her of his return to England, and stating that business of an urgent character would perhaps detain him in Durham for a few days ; but he would return to London as soon as possible and

see her. The next morning he started by the mail train for S—, without having met with any one in London whom he knew.

On the evening of the second day Frank got leave of absence from his ship for a few hours, and went to Hackney for the purpose of seeing Mrs. Bruce, and telling her all the cheering news he could about her grandson; but on his arrival at her house he found it shut up. He learnt from one of the neighbours, that Mrs. Bruce had closed her shop more than two months ago, though she still lived in the house, when she was at home. She was seen to leave home in a great hurry that morning, soon after the postman had called on her, but where she went nobody could guess; she was such a sly old woman, she never told any one her affairs. A little group of women soon gathered around Frank, as he was making his inquiry, and some of them wanted to know more than he could tell them of Mrs. Bruce's business. They also were anxious to know what had become of her proud grandson; but they did not get any satisfactory news from Frank. He soon returned to his ship, cogitating over the cause of Widow Bruce's retiring from her grocery business, and also over the mystery of her sudden departure from her home that morning.

When Ben arrived at S—, he hired a cab at the railway-station and drove direct to Newby Hall. He purposely avoided going to the Red Lion or to any other inn, for he feared he might be an object of curiosity, as he was before, and he had no desire for such notoriety or for obsequious attention either. He found the external aspect of Newby Hall much the same as when he was there before. The blinds were all drawn down, and the same deathlike stillness and gloom

seemed to hang about the place, and he supposed Mrs. Marshall's grief for her lost son was as poignant as ever. The footman, whom he had seen before, opened the door and bowed very respectfully to him, and then showed him into the same sombre parlour where the family portraits were hanging to the wall. In less than two minutes the footman opened the door again, and Miss Marshall, clad in deepest mourning, entered the room. Her manner was peculiarly excited, and Ben thought he had never before seen such a dazzling beauty; but he had no time for admiring observation, for she rushed toward him, flung herself into his arms, and kissed him passionately.

"My darling, darling Ben!" she exclaimed, and clasped her arms about his neck with almost ecstatic fondness, while tears rolled down her lovely face. "Oh how glad I am that you are come, dear! How anxiously I have been expecting you, week after week! The time has seemed to drag along so heavily with me! Oh I am thankful you have arrived safely!"

To say that Ben was surprised is too faint an expression—he was fairly astounded, spell-bound, as it were, and he mutely yielded to her warm endearments as if he were enchanted or mesmerised. "Is it a fascinating dream, or a trance, or some magical illusion? Is it possible that I am awake?" Those were questions which flashed into his brain for an instant, but his eyes as promptly answered, "It is all real life, and no magic about it, for there stands the old footman in his black livery, looking as if he were gravely interested in the loving scene." But more convincing than anything else, there was the charming Edith herself, still clinging to him, and sobbing out such expressions of tender endearment as had never greeted his ears before—much more

thrilling than the softest words of his late devoted mother. The tumult of conflicting feelings that was aroused in his breast no stoical reader can possibly imagine nor any prosy old writer describe. There was the glow of that pure veneration which he had first felt for the young lady, as for a being of almost sublime perfections, warring with a sense of the impropriety, nay, the almost wantonness of her conduct, in embracing a comparative stranger in that familiar way ; and there was her powerful fascination struggling with his sense of modesty and honour, and his sacred troth to virtuous Annie Blake—a mortal conflict between passion and principle ; but the latter was the victor. It was a hard struggle, but principle triumphed. To tear himself from her embrace was his immediate resolve—he dared not risk that bewitching contiguity another moment. In a state of excitement verging on bewilderment, he bore the half-fainting girl to a couch, and bade the footman sprinkle a little water over her face, and call her maid servant. Ben then left the house by the hall door, and was soon beyond the sounds of Miss Marshall's hysterical sobbing.

He walked hurriedly to the arbour in the park, where he had on his previous visit spent a pleasant half-hour. There he flung himself into a rustic seat, and tried to reflect on that most unlooked-for occurrence in his strange career. As soon as his disturbed brain had calmed down a little, it seemed clear to him that Miss Marshall was madly in love with him ; that hers had been a desperate case of love at first sight, and he sadly feared that it had affected her intellect. He could see it all, as plainly as love-craziness was ever seen ; and his being sent for over the sea in such a hurry was no longer a puzzling mystery to him. He had quite un-

wittingly smitten Miss Marshall on his short visit a few months before, and perhaps she had pined for him to such an alarming extent that her indulgent grandmother had been persuaded to break through the established etiquette, or rules of honest courtship, and had sent for him to console the lovelorn maid. Yes, it was now plain enough that the mysterious object Mrs. Marshall had in wishing to see him, was to request him to marry the maid. She had perhaps found out that he was a poor young man, and she fancied that money would buy his ready acquiescence to a marriage compact with her grand-daughter, though she was silly. The cash she had sent for him to Melbourne was a sort of golden bait, and lawyer Blackstone knew all about it, for there was a peculiarly cunning smirk on his face when he said, "I have a bank draft for £500, which is at your disposal, Mr. Bruce, if you will go to England immediately." All that was settled in Ben's mind, as decisively as any right verdict was ever arrived at by a special juryman; and perhaps it was rather flattering to his innate vanity.

Then Ben sat for a while, and tried to recall every tittle of his strange emotion, when Miss Marshall first threw her soft arms about his neck, and called him her "darling, darling Ben!" with such touching pathos, while her beautiful, innocent looking eyes seemed to speak of undying love. It was an enticing retrospect, and he sat and yielded to fancies more romantic than he had ever before indulged, or even dreamed of. He had heard and read of ladies of high degree occasionally becoming violently in love with men much below them in rank; so there was nothing actually new in his case except perhaps his being sent for from the opposite side of the world—he had never heard of that being done

before, though he had heard of many curious expedients which over-heated love had adopted. The most proper young man alive might perhaps find it somewhat hard to honestly condemn Ben for indulging in those fascinating reflections for a few minutes, still his conscience owned that it was not fair to his darling Annie. He could not wholly persuade himself that it was disagreeable to submit to the tenderly crazy caresses of poor Miss Marshall ; still, as a man of honour, he must not place himself in the way of her repeating the loving process—nay, he dared not subject his moral principles to so hazardous a test—to say nothing of the unmanliness of toying or trifling with a weak-minded young woman. He then determined that he would at once seek an interview with Mrs. Marshall, and explain to her his true position—unreservedly this time, and he would incidentally inform her that he was under a sacred engagement to Annie Blake, and that statement would perhaps stop her from making any appeal to him in behalf of her unhappy grand-daughter. He could see now that it was unwise of him to come to England before he knew what his errand was, but he did it for the best, and it was useless to fret about it. One thing he firmly decided upon, that he would resist all Mrs. Marshall's importunities to marry Miss Marshall ; he had promised his heart to his modest, humble Annie and she should have it, even though a duchess were to try to seduce him from his fealty.

With his mind fully made up to take an honest, manly stand, Ben left the harbour and walked with a firm step towards the house. He took a circuitous route, in order to give himself more time to recover his self-possession, and on coming in sight of the lodge gates, he saw a fly or cab just entering the drive.

"Visitors, I suppose," ejaculated Ben. "Perhaps they will only make a short stay, so I had better wait outside till they are gone." He then turned towards the arbour again, but on casting a side glance at the mansion, his surprise and consternation may be imagined when he saw his grandmother get out of the fly, and enter the hall doorway as unceremoniously as if she were going into her own little shop, after coming from market.

If Ben had been suspected of robbing the dear old lady of all her little stock-in-trade, and she had come to accuse him of his roguery, he could hardly have felt more concerned—or, I may say, more staggered. He again, somewhat pettishly, put the question to himself, "Am I awake, or is this all a perplexing dream?" He was soon, however, convinced that he was not asleep, and he hastily returned to the arbour in the park, as crestfallen as if he were going to the treadmill. There he sat in the rustic chair, looking more wretched than he had ever looked at sea, even in his most squeamish hour. His first impulse was to jump over the park fence, run across the fields to the railway-station, and take the first train for London, and then take the first ship for Melbourne; but on half a minute's reflection, he scouted that idea as unworthy of an honest head. Other wild schemes and devices were also discarded as impracticable. To run away, he thought, would only be a temporary relief to his trouble, like swallowing a narcotic pill or a sleeping draught; besides, after all, he was not a thief or a schemer.

"That one hasty, beggarly lie I told to Mrs. Marshall to hide my unlucky birth, has been the cause of more misery to me than any other wicked act I can remember committing," he soliloquised. "Not that I feel any

acute sorrow for the deception, I am ashamed to say, but it is the fear of being found out in a mean subterfuge that worries me. I have had infinitely more dread of Mrs. Marshall detecting me in a shabby lie, than I have felt for the wilful sin itself—more fear of Mrs. Marshall than I have of my Almighty Judge. Oh dear! I hope this humiliation will be a caution to me for life, to ‘keep the door of my lips,’ and never to expect any help from lying expedients.”

Ben sat a little while in quiet cogitation, and his opinion of himself during that mental exercise was of a most humbling character. Presently he started to his feet again, and exclaimed emphatically, “That deception of mine shall not disturb my mind any longer! I will go and make a full confession to Mrs. Marshall, and ask her to forgive me. I have not the least idea what my grandmother has come here for, but as she is now in the house, she shall hear my degrading explanation. Come what may, I will make a clean breast of it before them all. Pride instigated me to the sinful deceit, and pride must suffer for it.”

Ben then walked towards the mansion, with his heart resolved to do what was right in the matter. He was about to pull the handle of the bell at the hall door, when his grandmother rushed from one of the French windows in the parlour, and clasped him in her arms, with a maternal embrace, quite as hearty as the fondling he had received a short time before from Miss Marshall.

“Oh, my dear boy! My precious boy! how pleased I am to see you again!” exclaimed Mrs. Bruce, while tears of joy attested the truth of her words. Ben returned her embrace with affectionate warmth, and then he led her back into the parlour, and sat down beside her on a couch.

"Are you ill, my love?" asked his grandmother, gazing at his troubled face with some degree of alarm. "Do tell me what ails you?"

"I am not ill, grandmother; but—but—er—the fact is, I am bewildered, as you can see. I shall be better presently. Have patience with me and you shall hear all about it. Yes, yes, of course I am glad to see you, grandmother! But do pray tell me, in a word or two, what has brought you to this house, and how you knew that I was here?"

"Why, when I got your letter early this morning, telling me that your ship had arrived, I started off here directly to meet you. I just caught the express train; and oh dear me! what a terrible rate I have travelled at! I shall never forget it as long as I live. I have not got over my flurry yet. When I got here, about an hour ago, I found dear Edith in great distress. Poor girl! she was fretting herself half blind because she said you were so cold to her, and she has been looking for you day and night for ever so many weeks, as longingly as I have. Poor dear! she *was* anxious to see you, sure enough!"

"How? why? Gran——"

"Stay a minute, Ben, I am going to tell you. So I said to her, 'Edith, my love, it's only Ben's way. He looks cold and cross with me sometimes, but he is as loving a boy as the world ever saw—couldn't be kinder, only he is naturally nervous, and a bit fidgety and—' Now do pray sit down again, Ben! I really am distressed to see you so excited. I thought I should see you jumping for joy, as the saying is, at your good fortune."

"I have something disturbing my mind, grandmother; but I shall be better when I have explained it, and I

want you to hear it all. Where is Mrs. Marshall? I must see her immediately."

The look of alarm on his grandmother's countenance at that moment further perplexed him. "See Mrs. Marshall, Ben!" she said with trembling lips. "Oh don't distress me by talking in that dreadfully wild way! It is really wicked of you to upset us all this morning."

"I tell you again, I must see her, grandmother. I have something to explain to her, and my mind will not be easy till I have done it."

"Why, mercy 'pon us, Ben! don't you know that poor Mrs. Marshall has been in her grave eleven weeks or more?"

"Oh dear me! is it possible!" responded Ben, while a shadow of sorrow passed over his face. "I didn't know it. I had no idea of it, grandmother. This is quite a shock to me."

"Haven't you received our letters?—but no, no, I am forgetting that it takes nearly two months to reach Melbourne. You could not have received them."

"I have not heard any news from you since I left England, grandmother."

"But hasn't Mr. Mead explained matters to you, my dear?"

"I have not seen Mr. Mead, don't know the gentleman; in fact, I have not spoken to a soul about Mrs. Marshall since I landed. I came direct to the Hall in a cab, and since then I've been in a complete maze."

"Surely Edith has disclosed something to you, Ben?"

"You mean Miss Marshall, I suppose, grandmother. She has not explained anything to me; I wish she had done so, for I am quite——"

"Oh, my dear boy, what a mistake we have all made! You really don't know anything about it, then?"

"Know about what, grandmother? I am more perplexed than ever," said Ben sharply. "Do explain all this mystery to me. I know no more than an idiot why I was asked to return to England so hastily; but if you know, pray tell me at once, for this suspense is racking my mind, and I cannot bear much more of it."

"Goodness me! has nobody told you that poor Mrs. Marshall was your grandmother—your father's mother, and that dear Edith is your sister?"

"My sister!" exclaimed Ben, bursting into tears. He could not say any more, for he was almost overpowered by the thrilling surprise. Mrs. Bruce then rang the bell, and Edith soon entered the room. The next moment she was locked in Ben's arms; and the newly found brother and sister were relieving in tears and sobs the feelings of their surcharged hearts, while Widow Bruce, with uplifted hands, was reverently expressing her joy and gratitude at being permitted to witness such a happy family meeting on earth.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Few sons attain the place
Of their great sires, and most their sires' disgrace."

—*Pope.*

THAT was the most surprisingly eventful day Ben had ever experienced. His kind grandmother was fearful lest so much excitement should upset his brain, and a variety of sad contingencies presented themselves to her anxious mind. She had persuaded Edith to go to bed early, for the poor girl needed rest, though she would fain have stayed up later with her brother; and he was very loth to part with her. Again and again Ben's grandmother begged him to go to bed, but in vain. He said he should not be able to sleep a wink until he had learnt more of his family affairs, and of his own good fortune; so she was obliged to indulge his wish, and at a late hour that night they were sitting in the library together, and a very lively conference they had; such a one as they had never had before.

It appeared from Mrs. Bruce's statement, (which I shall give in fewer words than she used,) that soon after Ben's visit to Newby Hall, as before related, Mrs. Marshall had a singular dream, the precise nature of which she never would tell any one, for she was always careful not to encourage superstitious fancies; but it was supposed that it had reference to Ben in some way, and it evidently influenced her mind, for she was ex-

ceedingly anxious to see him again. Intent on that purpose she started for London, when she was thrown out of her carriage at her own lodge gates, and was severely injured. A few days afterwards she wrote a letter to Ben, addressed as before, urging him to come to Newby Hall as soon as possible, for she was very wishful to see him again. The letter was opened by Mrs. Bruce, who replied to it, stating that her grandson Benjamin had suddenly left his home, and she supposed he had returned to Melbourne. Several letters then passed between Mrs. Bruce and Mrs. Marshall, and eventually the former was induced to go to Newby Hall, when, to her great surprise, she discovered that Mrs. Marshall was the mother of poor Sophy's betrayer, whom she had only known by his second name of Gordon. Mrs. Marshall was greatly concerned when she learnt that Ben had left England, and she at once told her solicitor to take steps to insure his speedy return. Hence the instructions to Mr. Blackstone to search for Ben.

For some weeks Mrs. Marshall seemed to be progressing favourably, but unfortunately erysipelas set in, and her physician at length told her that her life was in danger. She received the news with calm resignation, and immediately began to arrange all her temporal affairs. She sent for Mrs. Bruce, and pressed her to accept of a home with Edith at Newby Hall; but she firmly declined to leave her present home, because it was the house that her poor daughter died in; so Mrs. Marshall bequeathed her an annuity, sufficient to maintain her in comfort. She at once shut up her shop, much to the surprise of her old neighbours, not one of whom could remember any one making a fortune in a small grocery shop in that street before. Mrs. Marshall

left all her real estate to Ben, and an ample provision was made for Edith out of her funded property. Mrs. Bruce had often visited Edith since her grandmother's death, and they had grown much attached to each other. They had each written a letter to Ben, but the letters did not reach him, because he left Melbourne just before the arrival of the English mail, so he did not know anything of his good fortune, until the news burst upon him in the overwhelming way I have tried to describe. Edith had eagerly anticipated her dear Ben's return, and she was delighted at the prospect of having a good brother to love and protect her. She had never seemed weary of asking questions, about his qualities and characteristics, of his fond grandmother, who was equally pleased to talk about him. When Ben arrived at the Hall, Edith was overjoyed to meet him. She supposed that he knew of his near relationship to her—that he had received her letter, or that he had seen his grandmother, and learned from her all the events that had occurred during his absence; so it is no wonder that the tender-hearted girl was hurt at his non-appreciation of her affectionate welcome—of his stony cold manner towards her, so different to what she had fondly anticipated.

"I can hardly yet believe it is actually true, grandmother, that this fine mansion and park, and all the grand furniture and pictures and plate, and rich chattels of all sorts, belong to your poor boy Ben!" he said excitedly, when his grandmother paused for breath in her interesting recital.

"It is all yours, my dear, and a vast deal more that you have not yet seen. But I expect Mr. Mead, the steward, will be here to-morrow, and he will tell you more than I can about your property. This I know

that everything the dear old lady had is fairly divided between you and Edith, except some legacies to old pensioners and public charities, and an annuity she was kind enough to leave to me. She said it was the just portion of yourself and your dear sister, and she had tried to make your shares pretty equal in value, though she wished you to have all her landed property."

"Grandmother, you never told me before that I had a sister!"

"I did not know it any more than you did, my dear. Edith is your father's daughter, but she is not closely related to me."

"Oh, I see, I see, grandmother. She is my half-sister. Bless her! She shall have a whole heartful of brother's love. How I shall prize the dear girl! I am so glad I have a sister. Who was her mother? do you know?"

"I have felt a delicacy in asking questions about her, Ben. All I can tell you is, that she died when Edith was born; and Mrs. Marshall took the infant and brought her up in her own house, and educated her as a lady. Ay, and she is a real lady, Ben, and so you will say when you know her as well as I do."

"Yes, she is a charming maid, and I am proud of my sister. What a dear, kind lady Mrs. Marshall must have been, grandmother! How I do wish I had seen her again before she died!"

"She was extremely anxious to see you, Ben. She told me that when she first saw you, she was struck with the great likeness you bore to your late father; and if she had not supposed that you were a native of Australia, she should have discovered your relationship to her there and then. What a pity she made that mistake, wasn't it, dear?"

Ben merely sighed in reply to that touching interro-

gation, and his grandmother continued : "She was indeed a good lady, Ben, and she will be sorely missed in this parish. She said to me, as she lay on her dying bed, 'Oh, Mrs. Bruce ! I do wish I had known, years ago, that you were struggling to bring up that dear boy ; how gladly I would have helped you, and provided for his proper education. But poor Mr. Marshall did not tell me of our son's misconduct to your daughter until just before his death. His motive, no doubt, was to save me from anxiety, but it would have been far better for us all if I had known it. I am thankful that I have it still in my power to provide for the dear boy. If I should not live to see his kind face again, give my fondest love to him, and tell him I hope, and I fervently pray, that he will strive to do good with the large fortune that I shall leave him.'"

"I shall not forget her loving words and her dying injunctions," said Ben with emotion.

"Indeed, I hope you won't, my dear ! She also said to me, 'There are many pensioners of mine among the poor people in this neighbourhood, Mrs. Bruce, and I especially commend them to the care and kindness of my beloved, newly found grandson, Benjamin Marshall.'"

"Did she call me Marshall, grandmother ?"

"She did, my dear. She said Benjamin Marshall ; and she said a deal more to me which I will tell you to-morrow. You had better go to bed now, love ; you have had too much excitement to-day."

"I shall not sleep if I go to bed, grandmother," said Ben, starting up and beginning to pace the room wildly. "Did you ever dream that you were eating custard apples, or hot-house grapes at six shillings a pound ?"

"No, my dear, I never dreamt anything of the sort ;

I don't remember that I ever saw a custard apple. Your poor grandfather had a hot-house, as I have often told you, and he grew lovely grapes too, as big as plums. They were for sale, you know, for we could not afford to eat them, though we have given your dear mother a few, now and then, for a treat. But what whimsical questions you ask me, Ben! Do be rational, there's a dear boy!"

"I can't be rational, grandmother. I have all sorts of uncommon fancies in my brain, flighty as diamond sparrows and skylarks. Ha, ha! did you ever imagine you were riding on an emu, faster than the 'Flying Scotchman' express train, that you travelled by to-day?"

"Oh dear me, Ben! you quite alarm me! Whatever ails you, my love? I never heard you go on in this strange way before."

"You never before saw me rolling in riches, or swimming in Nabob sauce. Ha, ha! What will my darling Annie and her mother say to it, when the wonderfully pleasing news gets to Carlton Cottage? Why don't you laugh, grandmother?"

"I am too weary to laugh to-night, Ben, but I shall soon cry if you don't get back to your right senses. Who is your darling Annie, as you call her?"

"Annie Blake. The most charming girl on the other side of the world—indeed, I never saw a girl anywhere that I thought was equal to her, except Edith. Ha, ha! How strangely romantic that my darling sister should be the only exception! Do you know, grandmother, I was in love with Edith at first sight, months ago! It is a living fact. I thought she was superior to a mere clay mortal, and I almost adored her. Of course I didn't know that she was my sister. Won't it be fun to tell her all about it? Only think! I can love Edith now

as much as I like, without making my dear Annie jealous! What a glory it will be for me to walk the streets with two handsome girls beside me! how all the young fellows will envy me! I must be off to Melbourne again next week and marry Annie, and then bring her home to see my charming sister. Hurrah! I'll give new hats and bonnets to all the beggars in Melbourne, on my wedding-day; and I'll bribe somebody to ring the big fire bell in Collins Street; and all the black fellows in the land, dressed in red blankets, shall dance a grand corroboree on the bank of the beautiful Yarra Yarra. Ha, ha! I wish they were at it just now!"

"Oh Ben, my love! do let me beg and entreat of you to go to bed. You are over-excited at the good news you have heard to-day, and I am sure it will injure your brain if you are not careful. Do go to your room, there's a dear boy. You'll wake up every one in the house if you continue to make this noise. You shall laugh and shout and dance as much as you like to-morrow, and I won't say nay to it."

"I tell you again that I shall not sleep a wink to-night, grandmother. But I don't want to keep you up any longer, and I wish you to go to bed. I must write a letter to Frank Shorter. Poor old fellow! how joyful he will be to hear of my rare good fortune! I'll tell him that the celebrated big Bendigo gold nugget is a nutshell compared with the heaps of nuggets that I have found, already dug up for me, enough to ballast a little brig. Ah, yes, you are right, grandmother, I ought to show respect for dear old Mrs. Marshall, for giving me all my wealth; and she was my other grandmother too. It would only be right to mourn for her, but I don't seem to be able to do it to-night. Ha, ha! It wouldn't be natural to weep when I can't help laughing."

"I wish you could help laughing, my dear, for it does not sound at all like rational mirth. It is nervous excitement, and I can see is doing you mischief. You have been unnaturally excited all the evening."

"It is such a marvellous change for me all at once, like the transformation scene in the pantomine that you once took me to see, when the blind beggar was turned into a king. Ha, ha! Only fancy, granny dear! Your poor boy Ben, the jobbing hat-box maker, and afterwards a greasy cook in an old schooner, suddenly becoming the owner of Newby Hall, and two coal mines, and lots of other valuable property; besides, perhaps, a barrowful of ready money in the bank. Isn't all that enough to excite any poor young fellow, who isn't daft? Ha, ha! I can't help being jolly. Now, grandmother, do have a little more patience and sympathy. Sit down again for a few minutes, and I'll sing you something touchingly appropriate to my happy condition. I have never heard it sung yet, and I don't think there is a special tune made for it; but never mind, I'll sing it to your favourite old Scotch song, 'The Bonnets o' blue.' Listen, granny!—

"I am monarch of all I survey;
My right there is none to dispute;
From the centre —"

"Stop! stop, Ben! For pity's sake, be quiet! That big footman will be running in here directly, without his livery, to see what all this uproar is about; and how shocked he will be to see his new master behaving in such a fantastic manner, when he ought to be mourning for the loss of his late kind relative. We are almost strangers to the servants, and I shouldn't like them to think we are heathens."

Those emphatic words had a subduing influence on Ben. He sat down, and for several minutes he was mute, while his grandmother continued, with increased seriousness, to express her mind to him. "Ben, my love! I tell you solemnly, you must pray for Divine guidance in your present critical circumstances. It is said, and I believe it is true, that sudden affluence is sometimes harder to bear than sudden poverty. Excuse me, my dear, for speaking so plainly, but I think you have forgotten to apply to-day to the true source of comfort, and the only sure way to calm the mind under violent excitement of any kind. We always flee to God to help us when we are in trouble; but there is equal need for us to seek Him when all around us seems flourishing. Solomon said, 'In the day of adversity consider'—yes, and no one knew better than the wise king himself that the time of prosperity was one of danger. I too have proved that fact in my own humble experience. When I was in my little shop at Hackney, living from hand to mouth, as the saying is, and beset by influences of a most depressing kind, I used to pray earnestly for help and comfort. Every morning, on my knees, I prayed, 'O Lord, give me strength for this day's duties or its trials. Give me bread and peace, and a contented heart. Teach me Thy way, and lead me in a plain path.' And I used to try to stay my mind on some of the sustaining promises in God's word—hundreds of which I have stored in my memory. Often I have gratefully exclaimed, 'O Lord, in the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul.' And truly I had sometimes a multitude of perplexing thoughts in my poor heart, and I was surrounded by a host of foes; but I could say, 'The Lord is my defence, and my God is the rock of my refuge.' That was some

of my daily experience in the time of my poverty. But after the unexpected good turn in my fortune,—and dear Mrs. Marshall kindly left me an annuity, as I have already told you, Ben, more than sufficient for all my wants,—I seemed for awhile to be, as it were, independent of the God of my mercies. Yes, dear, with shame I confess it, I was less earnest in my supplication for Divine help, and I seemed to have more faith in my fixed income to supply my wants, and in the influence of my money and my newly found rich friends, to stop unruly neighbours from molesting me, as they often used to do when they knew that I was poor. But I am thankful to say the deceitfulness of riches did not cause my downfall. It was only a temporary declension, and I hope I am now as humble as ever I was. The Lord has dealt very bountifully with us, Ben ; but we must ever remember that He has power to take away our riches. I am thankful that you have listened to me so patiently, love.”

“All that you say is quite true, grandmother,” said Ben tenderly. “I feel grieved that I have given way to extravagant words and gestures, instead of showing becoming humility and gratitude to the bountiful Giver of all our mercies ; but my brain has been in such a whirl all day, that I have hardly been master of my actions. I thank you for your timely words of reproof, and also of Christian counsel : they have done my heart good, and I shall try to [remember them. Now you go to bed, dear grandmother,” he added, and he kissed her affectionately. “I am sure you must be weary. I will have a little quiet meditation and prayer by myself before I retire.”

Grandmother Bruce’s experience of the deceitfulness of riches was not a new one: it has been experienced by

wealthy men and women in all ages. Ben being forewarned by the admonitory words of his anxious relative, was doubtless saved from many extravagances which would have been a trouble to him. Self-examination is a profitable exercise for every man ; and Divine grace is needful for guidance in every condition of life, but especially so in such a peculiar position as Ben was suddenly placed. When he retired to his bedroom, about three hours afterwards, his mind was quite composed, and he felt strengthened for the duties and responsibilities of his new station.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“For I, who hold sage Homer’s rule the best,
Welcome the coming, speed the going guest.”

—*Pope.*

WHEN Frank Shorter received Ben’s letter apprising him of his sudden change of fortune, he was not so much astonished at it as might be supposed, for he had felt a sort of presentiment that some uncommon good luck was about to overtake his young shipmate. But he was rather concerned at the incoherent style of the letter, for Ben wrote it overnight, before his mind had become composed, and the kind old sailor muttered to himself as he read it, “Poor Ben! I can see that you have not moral ballast enough on board for this sudden breeze of fortune that has come up to you. I don’t believe you will capsize altogether, but you had better furl all your light sails and mind how you steer, for you are in a squally latitude just now, and may be you don’t know it. It is very kind of you to give me such a hearty invitation to your grand home, and I’ll be off directly, for I know I shall be welcome, and perhaps I may be a help to you.”

Frank’s application for leave of absence was granted, and soon he was on the way to S——. When he arrived at Newby Hall, Ben was in busy conference with Mr. Mead and the executors of Mrs. Marshall’s will; but Mrs. Bruce received him, and her greeting was as homely as it was when she first shook hands with him across the

counter of her little shop in London. Frank knew that she was glad to see him. She first of all got him some refreshment, which he needed after his long journey, and then she gave him a full account of her grandson's affairs, and was just finishing her glowing narration, when Ben entered the room, and saluted his old friend with a cordiality which touched his heart. He grasped Ben's hand and said, "Bless you, my boy! I see your great lift up to fortune has not altered your bearing towards your poor old messmate."

"If you had come here two days ago, Frank, you might have fancied that my fortune was going to turn my brain; but I am thankful to say that it is now as rational as ever it was, and I can bear my elevation almost as composedly as you could sit on a topsail yard-arm in a hard breeze of wind. I need not tell you the means I used to get my mind quieted down, Frank. You know that earnest prayer will calm down a ruffled spirit like oil on breaking waves. Now I am sure my good grandmother will excuse us leaving her for a while; so come with me, Frank, I want to have a little confidential chat with you. We shall see you again by-and-by, grandmother. Frank will not go away for a few days, I hope."

"Now sit down in that soft arm-chair and make yourself at home, Frank," said Ben, when they entered the library. "You see I have plenty of reading when I can find time to sit down here quietly and enjoy myself."

"My word, you have a lot of books! quite a cargo!" replied Frank, gazing around at the thousands of well-bound volumes which loaded the shelves; and for a few minutes he seemed to be struck dumb with wonder and veneration. He had never seen so many books before, except in the Melbourne Free Library.

"I am afraid something is ailing you," Ben presently remarked, with an anxious look at Frank's face. "Can I get you anything in the shape of physic? I have a medicine chest big enough for an emigrant ship."

"No, thank you, I don't want physic. I am hearty enough. I am a little taken aback, or flurried, since I came into this grand house, that's all; and I hardly know how to speak to the master of it. Perhaps I shall get over these qualms presently."

"I understand a little how you feel, Frank; and now let me tell you that my sudden rise to fortune has not altered my feelings towards you in the least degree," said Ben, and he again shook hands with his old friend, and bade him try to throw off his diffidence, which would tend to make their intercourse embarrassing. "I am Ben still, and you are my trusty friend, Frank. I am really glad to see you, and I wish you to feel yourself at home in my house."

"Ay, you are as staunch as ever, Ben, and it does my heart good to see it. Wealth doesn't alter us in one way—rich or poor, 'a man's a man for a' that,' as the song says. But wealth changes a man's position in the world, there is no doubt about that; and it is always right and proper for him to keep his standing—in fact, he must do so. The captain of a frigate wouldn't be much unlike either of his crew if the ship were to go down and leave all hands swimming for their lives; there would be no standing on his dignity then; but while the ship is afloat, the quarter-deck is the captain's post, and the fore-castle is the place for common sailors. You see what I mean?"

• "Not exactly, Frank."

"Well, this is it, in plain words: you are now a gentleman of fortune, and I am only a rough old seaman,

though I have risen to a second mate's rank. When I was here a few months ago, I messed with the servants in their part of the house, and was on familiar terms with them, for they are a nice kindly lot. I shook hands with them all when I arrived here this morning, and I didn't object to it in the least—why should I? But after that it wouldn't look well for them to see me hobnobbing with you, and calling you Ben, or shipmate, as I have been accustomed to do, for it would most likely lessen their respect for you, and perhaps they might begin to be too familiar, which would not be exactly the right thing. You have a rare big ship to navigate now, my friend, and you must keep up good discipline among your crew, or you will soon have disorder and perhaps mutiny on board. However familiarly you may please to talk with me now we are down below, as it were, I had better keep a respectful distance from you when we are on deck, and all hands are looking at us. I am sure you can see the common-sense of my remarks, Ben. You have been long enough on shipboard to know the respect that is due to the captain."

"We will not argue out that knotty point to-day, Frank; we are not on deck at present, so let us chat in the old free and easy style, or it may confuse us both. I want your advice on a very tender subject. I have just had a long talk with my business men, and they say it is impossible for me to leave England for several months to come, as there are many important matters relating to the estate that need looking to, and I must be on the spot. I own that they are quite right, but it is a sore disappointment to me. I want to go to Melbourne to marry my dear Annie, and fetch her home to keep my house; but you see it is uncertain when I may be able to go. What shall I do, Frank? How shall I get the

dear girl here? That's the question I want you to help me to solve. You have often helped me with your counsel, and I specially need it now."

Frank sat for a few minutes rubbing his beard in a cogitating mood. Presently he said, "If you cannot go for Miss Blake, I don't know who would go more willingly than myself, and I am sure you can trust me on the errand. Here I am at your service, Ben; give the word of command, and I'll start off as soon as you like. I did mean to stay and try for a master's certificate, but that's no odds; I can wait for it till I come back; and perhaps I shall be a little wiser by that time, and have a better chance of passing my examination. I am sure Mrs. Blake would never let the girl come over the sea alone, but I daresay she won't have any fear of trusting her with me, if you write and explain everything; and I shall be as proud of the commission as a young midddy who is just put in command of a prize sloop."

"Thank you, Frank. It is the very plan I was going to propose to you, for I cannot see any other way of managing the delicate business. Mrs. Blake has full confidence in you, I know, and when she understands how I am situated, I think she will not object to let Annie come to England with you. When can you leave your ship?"

"To-morrow, if I like. My time is up."

"Then I wish you to leave, Frank; and consider that you are in my service, if you don't object to serve me. Now, please to stop a bit and hear what I have to say, and don't be so independent all at once. I know very well that you have no selfish motive in offering yourself; you are anxious to oblige me, and I am able and willing to pay you. If I could not afford it, I might be glad of your free services. I will pay your expenses, and give you five hundred pounds besides."

"Oh! that's too much altogether, Ben. My old head would perhaps be upset if I had such a lot of money without working for it."

"No fear of that, Frank. You know as well as I do the way to keep your mind steadily balanced in prosperity as well as in adversity. As to the sum I offer you, it is a mere trifle to me. I have more ready money now in the bank than I could spend on myself in seven years. Besides, it is only fair that I should pay you liberally, for haven't you helped me to get my fortune? Yes, yes, you have, Frank, and I don't forget it—it would be shabby if I did. You know that my happiness is concerned in your bringing dear Annie home to me as speedily as possible."

"You may depend I won't waste much time. Your dear old grandmother is expecting me to stay here a few days, and it would be a real treat to me to take some quiet rambles over your fine park and the woods beyond; but 'duty first and pleasure afterwards' shall be my motto from this day forward. How had I better go to Melbourne, do you think, Ben?"

"Go in the fastest steamer you can find, and go as a first-class passenger, of course. Remember that I shall cheerfully pay every shilling of your outlay. You will not waste money, I know, but you need not be over sparing; and don't be afraid to dip your hand into your pocket on my account, whenever you come across a case of real distress, either at sea or on shore."

After an hour or two of further discussion on the details of the important mission Frank was about to undertake, it was decided that he should go to Melbourne by the next Suez mail steamer. Mrs. Bruce was exceedingly pressing that he should stay a few days at the Hall; but without explaining to her his private

business, Frank said he could not spare the time at present, for he had to get ready for sea.

"What, going to sea again so soon, Mr. Shorter?" asked grandmother, with some little show of vexation that he should seem to slight an invitation to stay for a while in her grandson's fine mansion; besides, she had such a lot of news that she was longing to pour into the ears of some confidential friend.

"Yes, I must go afloat again, ma'am, much as I would like to stay in this beautiful new home of yours."

"Well, well, sailors have strange fancies, certainly," continued Mrs. Bruce, in a softened tone. "I just now remember a poor little woman who, long ago, was a regular customer at my shop in Back Street; her husband was a ship carpenter, and he had been voyaging in one ship to India for more than twelve years, so you see she did not have much of his company. But he was a good, steady man for all that; and she always drew half of his wages while he was at sea, and when he came back again he usually took the other half home to her, which was quite right and honest of him."

"Pray excuse me for interrupting you, dear grandmother, but Frank is rather pressed for time; he wants to catch the next express train for London," gently suggested Ben, who was afraid his grandmother was beginning one of her long stories, and he knew that Frank was rather impatient.

"I will not detain Mr. Shorter, my dear, if he wishes to go; but what I was going to say about the whimsical ship carpenter is simply this: whenever his vessel lay in the London docks, unloading or loading, he used to sleep on board, in his 'old bunk,' as he called it, though he had a nice comfortable little home on shore, and a kind, tidy wife. I believed he loved his wife too; but he used

to say that he could not sleep nicely out of his bunk, although I was told it was a poky sort of coffin affair, not much more than five feet long, and he was a big boned man, taller than you, Ben."

"Ha, ha! every man to his fancy!" laughed Frank. "But I'll promise you, grandmother, that if I ever have the luck to get a snug crib of my own on shore—wife or no wife—I'll sleep in it, and let any simple fellow who likes have my bunk on shipboard."

About three days afterwards, Frank started for Melbourne, taking with him many handsome presents and love letters for Annie, and an affectionate letter from Ben to Mrs. Blake, offering her a home at Newby Hall as long as she lived, or if she preferred it, a separate home in the neighbourhood, if she would return to England with her daughter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“Envy will merit, as its shade, pursue,
But, like a shadow, prove the substance true.”

—*Pope.*

ALTHOUGH Ben possessed more wealth than he had yet found time to calculate, and was surrounded by luxuries of all sorts, he was not wholly free from petty cares and anxiety; not the least of which was the trouble he had to induce his grandmother to show a little more becoming dignity of manner than she used to show when in her shop at Hackney. She could not be persuaded to keep out of the servants' quarters at the Hall, indeed, she liked that part of the house better than any other. In her free intercourse with the domestics she heard all the stirring news of the neighbourhood, including a good deal of scurrilous gossip about her grandson, which she felt it was her duty to tell him, in order, as she said, that he might instruct his lawyer to put a stop to it immediately. The honest old lady had a much higher estimate of the powers of lawyers than some of the learned gentlemen have of themselves; and she thought that Ben's wealth ought to be a sort of impenetrable hedge around his reputation, to shelter him from the attacks of vulgar tongues. His past experience had been confined to the humbler walks of civilized life, and he met with harassing opposition there, as I have cursorily shown; but he had yet to learn that envy and

uncharitableness are active in the ranks of the rich as well as among the poor.

Ben adopted the name of Marshall, as it was his late grandmother's expressed wish that he should do so, and that caused much surprise amongst the neighbours. His pedigree was investigated, and his personal qualities were discussed, and opinions formed thereon as unfavourable to him as if he were a returned convict from some penal settlement, or a real London black-leg. Reports also, as false as they were cruel, respecting his future designs for managing his estate, got into circulation and caused quite a panic among his tenantry. Ben had been reported, by some mischief-maker, to be intent on raising the rents of his farms, and that he would decrease or wholly discontinue the allowance to several old villagers, who had for years been pensioners on the bounty of the late Mrs. Marshall; and he had the mortification of observing wherever he went that he was an object of distrust or aversion to the farmers and the labouring people, while the gentry around treated him with a coolness which almost reached contempt. He was not sorry that the fashionable folks kept aloof from him, he had hardly expected any familiar notice from them, but he was grieved to see that he was so much misunderstood by his tenants and others, whom he was desirous of benefiting in every way he could. For a while his mind was constantly exercised in forming plans for making everybody understand his true character, but he had to give that up as a hopeless task. As well might he have tried to make every one appreciate pure air and cleanliness, or any other great social virtue.

The Rector of the parish was an excellent old gentleman, who had known the Marshall family for fifty years or more. He called at the Hall the day after Ben ar-

rived, and had a long conversation with him, and seemed pleased to find that his new parishioner was a Christian gentleman, although he had not much fashionable polish about him. The Rector had promised the late Mrs. Marshall that he would visit her grandson, Mr. Marshall, as often as practicable, and would help him with his counsel whenever he needed it. The subsequent visits of his reverence to Newby Hall were frequent; and although he did not obtrude his opinions at any time, he showed a willingness to advise Ben upon anything that he proposed, either secular or spiritual. He soon gained Ben's confidence and affection, and he often opened his mind freely to his kind pastor.

"Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil," said the peace-loving Rector, in his usual calm way, when Ben one day peevishly expressed his determination to take legal proceedings against some of his most active detractors. "All the appliances of the law cannot wholly restrain the tongue of slander, and every one is liable to be assailed by it, from our gracious Queen on the throne to her humblest subject. Bear it patiently, my dear young friend! That is the safest way, because it accords with the precept and example of Him whom you profess to love and serve—Jesus, the Prince of peace. I can sympathise with you. I am sure it must be hard for you to bear the ill-natured reports of the villagers, and the cutting philippics of some of the neighbouring gentry, who certainly ought to have more sense and good feeling; but to live it all down is your best policy. You will be more respected as you become better known."

"I can assure you, sir, most of the reports against me are quite untrue."

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. Marshall; but that is so

much the better for you, and there is really less reason for you to fret about them. You might well be grieved if you were conscious that the reports were true. Your slanderers may declare that you are dishonourable or what not, but they cannot make you so if you resolve to be otherwise. In the course of my long experience of the world, I have never yet met with a man or woman in any walk of life who has wholly escaped the stings of envy and slander; and, perhaps, the higher their rank or station, the more vehemently they are assailed. History in all times confirms my statement. Some of the holiest living divines—men who are ‘burning and shining lights’ of the age, have been, and perhaps are still, vilely abused and misrepresented; and it is not to be marvelled at, for ‘if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?’ Great literary men, too, rarely escape censure. Some, whose writings are certainly not of a polemical character—Sir Walter Scott, for example (than whom few authors have contributed more to the popular amusement)—suffered at times from very sharp criticism. I daresay you have in your fine collection of books that beautiful poem, ‘The Lady of the Lake,’ and if you will at your leisure look at Sir Walter’s preface to it, you may be amused at some of his pungent remarks to his detractors. I rather wonder that he troubled himself even thus far to notice them,” added the Rector, smiling; “but I have alluded to the subject merely to show you that, exalted as he was, and useful as he undoubtedly was, he had his enemies as well as you have, but he lived down all their opposition, and he has left a name that will, perhaps, be honoured as long as the world stands. Again, then, I would kindly say to you, Mr. Marshall, have patience with your envious

foes, and you may in time make friends of them ; but if not, be assured that their malice cannot harm you any more than the shadow of a passing coach could knock you down."

Ben was much comforted by his esteemed pastor's gentle counsel, and he resolved to follow it. At another visit of the Rector, Ben consulted him on the course of study to pursue in order to improve his limited education. "Mr. Mead is willing to continue the management of the estate for a while," continued Ben, "and I think it is very desirable that he should do so until I get more experience, and understand my tenants better than I do at present. In the meanwhile I will endeavour to qualify myself for my improved position, and for increased usefulness in the world." Ben further explained that he had begun a course of self-education on ship-board, but he thought it, perhaps, was not a course that was the most advisable for him under his altered circumstances. He wished to make the best use of his time.

The Rector commended him for his good judgment, and said he knew of many useful books, that he had often recommended to young men who were desirous of improving their minds—a list of which he would carefully write out ; but he thought that as money was not an object with Ben, and he had ample leisure, he had better engage a qualified tutor. "I am glad you have asked my advice on this important subject, Mr. Marshall," added the Rector, "as it gives me an opportunity for speaking a few words in behalf of a worthy young friend of mine, who has just been obliged to give up a curacy in one of our eastern counties on account of a temporary indisposition, caused, no doubt, by over-work. He has been advised by his doctor to

try a change for a time to a higher locality, and this place would suit him admirably. I think he would be willing to direct your studies in return for a quiet home at the Hall—but I need not say anything about terms, you will act fairly, I know. You have rooms to spare, and you will find my friend, Mr. Mosely, an acquisition to your home circle. I shall be pleased, indeed, to have him for a neighbour.”

Ben’s glad looks showed how much he approved of the suggestion. After some discussion on the subject, the Rector kindly offered to write to his friend and ascertain if he was willing to make the desired arrangement.

“I think, sir, I had perhaps better consult my sister before I decide. Edith is my housekeeper; and she may possibly object to take a young gentleman—a stranger—into our family circle.”

“True, true, Mr. Marshall; I admire your brotherly consideration. I had forgotten that preliminary part of the negotiations. Your dear sister is worthy of all the consideration and affection you can show her. I have known her from her infancy, and to know her is to love her. She has a very refined mind, and is highly accomplished and clever, as you must know; but above all she is a devoted and consistent Christian. I would advise you to make her your confidante in all your affairs. Consult her in this matter of the choice of a tutor; and when you have arrived at a decision you can come and tell me. I may just say—and you can tell Edith—that I know Mr. Mosely intimately, and his late father was one of my most valued friends at college. If you should receive him as an inmate at the Hall, you will find that he is intelligent, though unobtrusive; in short, he is a Christian gentleman, and an earnest, hard-working

minister of the gospel. He is also a scholar, and well qualified as a tutor."

After the good Rector had departed, Ben told Edith all the particulars of their interview; and he was not a little amused at her surprised look when he explained his wish to engage the Rev. Mr. Mosely as his private tutor. She sat for some time in thoughtful silence, and then she said, "I am sure our dear Rector would not recommend any one to our home who was not worthy of our confidence and hospitality. We don't know what the young curate is like: he may be an oddity; but never mind, Ben dear, for your sake I will do all in my power to make his stay at the Hall pleasant, so you may send for his reverence as soon as you please; and I hope that under his tutorage you will turn out a creditable pupil. I daresay grandma will take care that he does not cane you too much."

"I thought you would favour my wishes and plans, you little unselfish jewel!" said Ben, kissing Edith fondly. "For your dear sake I will make the very best use of my time with my tutor. I cannot but feel my lack of good training, especially when I am with you, and I shall try to remedy my defects in that way as much as possible. I may never be as clever as you are, Edie, but I will do my utmost to spare that loving heart of yours from being pained by any gross exhibition of ignorance or boorishness on the part of your newly-found brother."

"Pray don't talk in that way, Ben. You are a gentleman, and I am very proud of you. Poor dear grandma and I were struck with your nice deportment the first time we saw you. Your deficiency in early tuition is to be regretted certainly, but you are wisely trying to improve yourself, and I mean to help you in every way I

can, so be of good courage. With two tutors you will surely make fair progress towards perfection."

"Thank you, darling! Your words are very encouraging. I shall ask you for your help occasionally with my lessons. I have often called to mind a sermon that I heard from an honest lay preacher when I was staying at the peaceful little town on the Hunter River that you have heard me speak of, where the bush birds are always singing, and many of the streets are covered with green sward. His text was, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' The preacher was a plain speaking man, without any college training, and I daresay any one who was listening for the mere sake of criticising might have detected some slight flaws in his style; but I was too much interested in the discourse to notice unimportant trifles. He was a farmer, and he seemed to take his hearers all over his ploughed fields and his flower garden, and over his bush paddocks, too, for apt illustrations and metaphors, of which he had no lack. One of his concluding sentences I specially remember. He said, with impressive earnestness, 'Oh that every man would pause for a few minutes and ask himself the solemn questions, Where shall I be a few years hence? And what am I now doing that will yield an influence for good in the world after I have left it?' Those simple words made a lasting impression on me. I often think of them. In my quiet hours on ship-board I have sometimes pondered over the widespread mischief some men are causing in the world with their money and their influence, and how little good, apparently, they are seeking to effect with it; and then I have half-drowsily defined many philanthropic schemes that I would carry out if I had riches. Of course I then had no idea that a large fortune was almost within my grasp. But now

that it is a reality—that I am wealthy—I mean to practically work out some of the plans that I concocted when I thought I was merely building castles in the air. What do you say to my plans and projects, sister? Give me your valuable opinion.”

Edith put her arms lovingly round his neck, and with tears of joy in her beautiful eyes, she said, “My dear Ben! I am glad to hear you talk in this Christian-like, sensible way. I shall be proud to help you carry out your benevolent designs with all my heart—yes, and with all my money, too; you know, I am almost as rich as you are, though I don’t deserve half as much.”

The good Rector lost no time in communicating with Mr. Mosely, apprising him of the rare opportunity that offered for his getting the change that his health so much needed, and urging him to come to Newby Hall forthwith. But the curate was evidently of a cautious turn, and he did not fancy taking a long journey before knowing what he was going for—which was quite right. A correspondence, extending over a fortnight, ensued between Ben and him before he fully decided to move. He afterwards explained that a disinclination to leave his loving, rustic flock at Bardley was the cause of his tardiness. Many of his parishioners, he said, were agricultural labourers—perhaps the poorest class of toilers in England—yet there were some amongst them who were Nature’s noblemen, and he loved them for their real honesty of heart and life.

“Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.”

At length the wished-for arrangement was made, and the day came when Mr. Mosely was expected to arrive at Newby Hall. Ben had gone in his carriage to meet him at the railway-station, and Edith was waiting behind one of the drawing-room blinds, with a very natural womanish curiosity to see what sort of a looking man their new guest was. She had not dared to ask the Rector any questions about him—whether he was tall and thin, or short and stout, bearded or shaven; whether he was talkative or taciturn, lively or demure. Of course she could not think of asking such questions, though she would like to know. She had pictured him in a variety of phases; and it's not at all to be wondered at if she felt a little anxious about his general bearing or disposition, considering that he was to be a permanent inmate of the house—a member of the family circle. Her mind was much relieved when, from her peeping-place, she saw, after the carriage door was opened, a tall, clerically dressed gentleman alight, closely followed by her brother; and as the two stood side by side for a moment, she thought that as far as their figures were concerned they might readily be taken for cousins, if not for brothers. Ben had, perhaps, the best looking face, because it was a more healthy colour, but the curate had the longest beard, and it was of a darker shade of brown than Ben's. Altogether he was a striking looking young gentleman, and not at all like some of the odd figures her fancy had conjured up. She was pleased.

When introduced by Ben to Edith, Mr. Mosely was modestly polite. At luncheon, which was just ready, he showed the easy deportment of a gentleman who was accustomed to refined society; he was affable and moderately cheerful, but not over-talkative—as some young men are, who seem anxious to tell all they know in an

hour or two. After lunch Ben showed his guest the suite of rooms that had been prepared for him in the south-western wing of the mansion, at which he seemed highly pleased. Doubtless he estimated the gladdening contrast between his present palatial home and his late lodging place in an isolated old farmhouse (which had the fame of being haunted), and with a ploughman's wife for his sole attendant. But Ben's library seemed to be the most attractive place to his reverence; and his dark eyes flashed along the numerous well-packed bookshelves with as much interest as a Fijian chief would display when gazing at the heaps of golden coin in the treasure vaults of the Bank of England, or the Royal Mint. Mr. Mosely was almost a bibliomaniac.

The next day Ben began to devote himself in earnest to the course of study which his tutor proposed for him. It seemed as formidable as his first effort at climbing to the main-skysail yard on board the *Bluejacket*, but he manfully resolved that mount up he would.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“ And when once the young heart of a maiden is stolen,
The maiden herself will steal after it soon.”

—*Moore.*

WHEN Frank returned to London he got his discharge from his ship without any delay, and then he began to get ready to start on the mission he had undertaken for his friend Ben. Foremost of his preparations, he went to a respectable tailor, and for the first time in his life he submitted to be measured with a tape-line. He had heretofore worn slop clothing, as careless sailors usually do; but as his circumstances had so much improved, and he was entrusted by his wealthy friend with so important an errand, he thought he should only be showing due respect to all persons concerned, by appearing in a becoming garb. He had another reason for making himself look as smart as possible, though it was a secret only known to himself. It had occurred to him in one of his ruminating seasons, that he might happily induce Widow Blake to return to England with her daughter, not as a widow, but as his wife. The idea was encouraging to his latent vanity, and prompted him to doff his rough nautical attire, for garments of cut and quality, which showed his manly figure to the best advantage; and when he appeared on board the mail steamer, he was almost as genteelly dressed as the proudest Indian civilian on the passenger list. The

marked respect his new clothes gained for him was amusing ; and he muttered to himself one day, as he was having a quiet walk on the main deck : " Sailors often laugh at tailors as if they were mere dummies in the world ; but that is a mistake, which I can see more plainly than I ever saw before. They may not be so handy on a topsail-yard as they are with a yard stick, but for all that, tailors are mighty men in their way, and their influence on society in general is often greater than parsons, or statesmen, or learned doctors. It is as clear as moonlight to me, that if I had not been rigged out by a first-rate tailor, that proud-looking planter from Ceylon would no more have chatted with me at tiffin to-day, about growing coffee and nutmegs, than he would condescend to smoke a pipe with the cook in his galley yonder. Ha, ha ! what a telling difference there is to the wearer, between a superfine cut surtout coat, and a slop-made monkey jacket, although they may both have been spun from wool grown on the same sheep station, and perhaps sent to market in the same ship."

When Frank landed in Melbourne, dressed in his smart clothes and a glossy silk hat, and with gloves on his hands, his old shipmates would not have known him ; but he was not sorry on that account. Owing to his reformed habits of strict sobriety, his complexion had wonderfully improved, and he had lost the puffy rubicund look, which is one of the inevitable signs of hard drinking. His face, though bronzed by exposure to the weather, had a healthy hue, and his eyes were bright and seemed always wide awake. His beard and whiskers were trimmed with careful taste, and his erst shaggy locks were closely clipped in modern style. Altogether he was a smart-looking man, and when Mrs. Blake

opened her door at his modest rat-tat, she was really delighted to see him. Annie was glad, though her heart secretly fluttered with anxiety, lest he should be the bearer of some ill-tidings from her lover.

When the first warm greetings were over and a few home subjects had been talked of very briefly, Frank began to explain the special object he had in returning to Melbourne so speedily. He had carefully studied his task beforehand, so he set about it as deliberately as a popular barrister opens his brief. He knew it would not be very easy to persuade Mrs. Blake to part with her daughter, so he did not rashly say all he wished to say in a few excited sentences. He was negotiating for something more precious than the richest merchandise, so he acted with becoming circumspection. He told them of Ben's extraordinary good fortune, and incidentally described his grand mansion, and the park and gardens and other charming surroundings, and at the same time he was watching the effect of his report on his attentive hearers. Mrs. Blake's frequent sighs were as eloquent as words, in showing what she thought of all the grandeur, and Annie looked almost as serious as if she had heard that Ben was confined in a debtor's prison; they were both afraid that Ben's exaltation would be a barrier to their continued friendship with him, and Annie almost gave him up as lost to her for ever.

Without waiting to hear their opinions, Frank then explained to them the reason why Ben was unable to leave home for awhile; and how that he had commissioned him (Frank), to go to Melbourne by the most direct route, and express to Annie his earnest wish that she should go to England, with all possible speed, to share his good fortune and to make him happy for life.

"Here is a letter for each of you," added Frank, in-

interrupting the hasty objections which he thought they were going to offer. "I dare say you will find that Ben has written his wishes and hopes in a softer way than I have told them to you. Please to read what he says, and let me tell you that you may believe every word of it; for though he is now rolling in riches, as the saying is, he is still the same kind faithful friend as ever, and true as a weather-glass. If I knew that he wasn't so, you wouldn't see me here on this errand, I'll warrant, for I have too much respect for you both to help any one to trifle with you or mislead you."

Frank thought it would be well to give the ladies time to read their letters, and to discuss the contents of them together quietly, so he soon excused himself for going away for awhile, but he accepted their pressing invitation to take tea with them in the evening. He had instructions from Ben to pay donations to several charitable and religious institutions in the colony, and he thought the sooner he paid the money the better, so he set about the pleasing duty forthwith.

First of all, he went to drop something into the money box at the door of the Seamen's Mission Church, at Sandridge, in kindly remembrance of the spiritual help and comfort Ben and he had received there, under the ministration of its zealous chaplain, Rev. Kerr Johnson. Thousands of sailors have had religious teaching and counsel in that little Bethel, and it would be well if all of them would follow Ben's good example, and send a little of their spare money occasionally, in aid of the funds of that useful institution; and also send something to help on the comfortable Seamen's Home. The writer has known Melbourne and Sydney long before Seamen's Churches or Seamen's Homes were established; and he can remember the sadly neglected

condition of the majority of sailors who visited those ports, many of whom, alas ! never sailed out of a port again. Now the men are well cared for, and it is purely their own fault if they neglect the freely offered help and advice of the seamen's missionaries, and allow themselves to be beguiled and perhaps plundered by the merciless horde of crimps and other land sharks, that live and flourish in those busy seaports, and who are morally accountable for the wreck and ruin of many a promising young sailor-lad, and for the broken hearts of fathers and mothers afar off.

The Mariners' Church in Sydney is a fine stone building, in a commanding situation ; and the Bethel flag can be seen waving from its lofty staff, from many parts of Sydney harbour. The religious services there are pretty well attended. For many years it had for its chaplain the Rev. Thomas Gainford, a gentleman who was admirably qualified for his duties by his genial manner, as well as from his long practical acquaintance with seamen and their peculiarities. He was a constant worker, often to be seen about the quays of Sydney, and there were not many ships in port that he did not visit. His memory will long be cherished in the hearts of seamen and others who have, through his faithful teaching, forsaken their old vicious habits, and resolved to live godly, righteous, and sober lives. About a year ago that excellent pastor died, greatly lamented. He was not much beyond life's meridian. A memoir of him and of his useful labours is now being written by his son ; and it will be published in a volume, perhaps before this brief notice of him is in print. It will be interesting reading. There is a Home for Seamen in Sydney, a large brick building, erected about a hundred yards from the Mariners' Church.

At the usual hour for tea, which Frank well remembered, he returned to Mrs. Blake's cottage and was again warmly received. As he had anticipated, Mrs. Blake was firm in her objection to let her daughter go to England alone; and she feared she could not accompany her, without making too great a sacrifice of the little property which her late husband had toiled hard to accumulate. There was no way that she could then see to accede to Ben's kind wishes; but she promised to consider the matter carefully over again, and to give her decision as soon as she could. Frank listened to the widow's sensible arguments in thoughtful silence, while Annie sat by looking pensive, but evidently prepared to yield dutiful obedience to her mother's wishes. It was far from being a merry evening to either of them, and it was drawing near to bedtime, without any definite plan having been arranged.

Frank was a thorough seaman, as I have before shown. He could steer a ship in a gale of wind with steady nerves, or he could at one time have stood at his gun in a sea fight, with the fearless determination which is so characteristic of all true British tars. But in the more tender operation of love-making he felt almost as incompetent as he was to play on a French horn or a church organ. Still he felt bound to make an attempt in that way. The *Great Britain* steamship was then lying in Hobson's Bay, and was advertised to sail for London ten days hence, and his earnest wish was to return by that ship, taking Mrs. Blake and Annie with him, the one as his wife and the other as his step-daughter. It seemed a hard duty to accomplish, but Frank was hopeful. He had given the subject many hours of happy cogitation when on his voyage to Melbourne, and had resolved, that when a favourable time came he

would open his heart to Mrs. Blake, in a modest, straightforward way, without any tacking. "Widows have more sense than young maidens," reasoned Frank to himself, "and Mrs. Blake will understand what I mean, without much palaver or waste of logic. I never yet made love to a woman, and I don't know the 'rules of the road' on that line, but I suppose my own natural gumption will help me when I begin to pop the question; and after all I may find it is as simple as firing off a great gun."

While Mrs. Blake was giving her opinion of Ben's proposition, in more words than I have just recorded, Frank was trying to make up his mind to speak up for himself—to tell his tale of love. He wished Annie was away, but he knew that she would not retire to rest before her mother went; so he at length resolved to say what he had to say in her presence, for he had nothing to propose that he need be ashamed of. So he coughed away a little huskiness of voice, and then stood up and said with tender boldness:—

"Mrs. Blake, I have a few words to say on my own behalf. I hope you won't be offended with me; but if you should think well of my proposal, we can all go to England together, as happy as three birds in a basket. I think you have known me long enough, ma'am, to believe that I mean what I say; and if I can't put my meaning into fine words, it is not the less honest and true. Through the generosity of my friend Ben, or Mr. Marshall I ought to call him now, I have enough money to buy a small vessel, by which I hope to earn the means of making a comfortable home on shore. If you will agree to share that home with me, I shall be prouder than if I were to receive the appointment of harbour master of Port Philip. I offer you my hand

and heart, Mrs. Blake, and I promise to do all that a true man can do to make you happy and comfortable. We can moor ourselves for life in our native land ; but if you prefer it we will return to this colony, after seeing Annie carefully settled, for no place comes amiss to a sailor. Please to tell me what you think of my rough-spun proposal ; but whatever you say to it, I hope you won't be offended with me."

"Oh, Mr. Shorter ! you surprise me !" exclaimed the widow, in a tone which did not indicate displeasure : "I am astonished at what you say."

"Ay, I have no doubt of it, ma'am. I am astonished myself that I have been able to say as much, but I mean every word of it. I don't want you to give me an answer to-night : think over it, ma'am, and let me know to-morrow." Frank then said "good-night," and retired to his bedroom, leaving the widow and her daughter almost overpowered by feelings of the softest kind.

I have before endeavoured to show that Mrs. Blake was a sensible woman, so the reader has anticipated her reply to Frank's manly proposal. The next morning she gave him a favourable answer, to the rejoicing of his heart. Their courtship was necessarily a short one, but no doubt it was an interesting time to them both, as it usually is in honest love suits. The preparation for their marriage was made in quiet order ; and in less than a week from the date of Frank's arrival in Victoria they were married at the Seamen's Mission Church. It was the wish of both the bride and bridegroom that the ceremony should be a quiet one, so there were not more than six of Mrs. Blake's most intimate friends at the wedding feast. Some of Frank's waggish shipmates had, however, heard of his match with his former land-lady, and were resolved to honour him, in their peculiar

way ; so on his wedding night, they gathered a large company of serenaders (comprising nearly all the sober sailors in the port), in front of the cottage of Carlton, and lustily sang the sailors' song, "Hey O, cheerily man !" while the bridal pair inside laughed as merrily as if they were not half as old as their grey hairs proclaimed them to be.

It cost Mrs. Shorter many a sigh to consent to a summary disposal of her household goods and chattels. She fain would have taken a large portion of them with her, but her husband gently persuaded her that it was impracticable. She at length yielded to his wishes, and a broker was called in, who made an easy bargain of the whole in one lot. A neighbour, whom Mrs. Shorter had known many years, agreed to lease the cottage for a term, so that matter was satisfactorily arranged. Three days after their marriage, Frank and his wife and Annie went on board the *Great Britain* steamer, and the next morning she steamed away from her moorings, bound for Liverpool. As the stately vessel made her first bows to the ocean swell, in passing through the "rip" at Port Philip heads, Mrs. Shorter was overcome by various emotions, uppermost of which were gratitude and wonder, that her dear old mother's predictions were likely to be realized ; namely, that before she died, she should see her beloved daughter and grand-daughter again in old England.

It had been previously arranged that Frank should send a telegram *via* Galle, briefly stating the result of his errand to Melbourne [direct telegraphic communication between England and Australia was not then established]. Ben was awaiting the message which so deeply affected his happiness, with feelings which only ardent young lovers can understand. One morning, as

he was sitting in the library with his tutor, and was puzzling over a problem in the first book of Euclid, a servant handed him a letter, which had just arrived at the Hall. He hastily opened the envelope, and found that it was a telegram from Melbourne.

When considering how he should word his important message, Frank had remarked to his wife, "I never sent news off before in this way, and it is precious dear. Each word sent along this wonderful deep sea cable costs the price of a new hat, so I must be careful—at any rate, I won't be extravagant."

Frank could hardly have been more economical, for his message comprised only one word, "COMING"; but that word was as good as a folio to Ben, for he knew what it meant. He handed the paper to his tutor, who might have been as much puzzled over its meaning as his pupil had been over the mathematical problem, a few minutes before, only that he knew a few of Ben's love secrets.

"Hurrah! I am the proudest man in the land!" Ben exclaimed, as he started up from his desk. "Pray forgive my hilarity, Mr. Mosely. You may have similar cause for jubilant excitement some day, and I hope you will be as lucky as I am in your choice of a sweetheart. Now will you be kind enough to release me from any more lessons to-day, sir? I must go and see my sister, and tell her all my good news, which is just put into one word of six letters."

Of course Mr. Mosely could not refuse Ben's polite request, so away he ran into the drawing-room, where Edith was practising a piece of new music, for she was an accomplished pianist.

"Annie is coming!" he shouted in an ecstasy of delight. "Annie is coming to make me the happiest

man alive, and help me to love my kind sister more fondly. My precious darling is homeward bound! I hope she will have fair winds and fine weather all through the voyage, and then have happiness with me all the days of her life! Ha, ha! I am gushing over with joy, Edith; and how strange it is that I should feel inclined to weep when my heart is so full of gladness."

"I feel ready to cry too, dear," said Edith, while her beautiful face was beaming with happy smiles. "Oh, I *must* cry, Ben!" she added, as she threw her arms about his neck. For several minutes they were both shedding tears; but it was a sort of joyous weeping, that ordinary writers had better not meddle with, for they cannot explain the psychological anomaly.

The general stir at Newby Hall for several weeks ensuing was unprecedented in the experience of "the oldest inhabitant." There were workers indoors and out of doors—painters and decorators and masons and artisans of other grades. It was a busy season indeed, quite a harvest time for the tradesmen around, for Ben considerably determined on employing all the people in the neighbourhood who were able to do the work he required to be done, before he sent elsewhere for workmen. Edith was busy in directing indoor decorations, where her refined taste was brought into useful exercise. Ben was busy in overlooking the external renovation of the mansion and out-buildings, or in suggesting various improvements to a promising young architect (a son of the village miller), whom Ben had specially engaged as superintendent of works. There were no drones in that human hive, everybody was busy; and when their work was completed, it was unanimously confessed that the old Hall and its surroundings had never before looked so grand or imposing. Ben was an agreeable master to

work for, because he was so considerate to his employes, and he always seemed pleased with their work. He knew that he had good reason to be satisfied and pleased, for every one was doing his or her part towards making the homestead look extra stylish before the young bride arrived ; and Ben's heart swelled with happy emotions as he thought how his precious Annie's bright eyes would sparkle with rapture, when she saw the beautiful home that she was to call her own.

Grandmother Bruce was not invited to Newby Hall till nearly all the alterations were effected. She was a little ruffled that she had not been sent for earlier ; however, she soon got over it, and seemed to be determined to make up for lost time and opportunity by extra efforts. Few of the helpers showed more activity than she did with her hands, and her tongue was not often silent. All Ben's soft admonitions could not much affect her inclination for fraternising with the servants, so he at length ceased to trouble himself in the matter.

"Yes, Ben, dear !" said grandmother when he was reasoning with her one morning, "I admit that sometimes, 'Familiarity breeds contempt' ; but kindness will often cure contempt, and other ill-feelings. I have found that out long ago."

CHAPTER XXXV.

“Be wakeful, be vigilant, danger may be
At an hour when all seemeth securest to thee.”

—*Mrs. Southey.*

THE *Great Britain* steamship sped on her homeward way under the double propulsion of machinery and canvas, past the rocky “snares” off the south-east cape of New Zealand, and past many more dangerous snares in the form of drifting icebergs in her track over the wide Pacific Ocean. Onward sped the stately ship past the blustering Horn, where the south polar winds hold their weird carnival all the year round, playing wreck with unsound ships, and freezing the bones and marrow of poor sailors who have neglected to buy themselves warm outfits for that icy region, and leaving them perpetual remembrances in the twinges of rheumatic pains. Onward rolled the stanch old ship under the guidance of her popular commandèr, and at length she reached the much longed for region of sunshine and genial trade-winds, unscathed by the gales and foaming waves through which she had ploughed her rapid way.

Just now memory recalls an incident in my wanderings which I venture to print, and I am sure that by many readers the digression will be pardoned.

One morning in mid-winter, years ago, I was waiting at the Sandridge railway-station for the ten o'clock train to Melbourne. The weather was bleak, and the

station was draughty, so I felt the comfort of my overcoat and woollen muffler. Presently a tall handsome man walked on to the platform, after landing from a boat at the railway jetty. From his gait and his ruddy complexion, I judged that he was a sailor, though he was dressed in genteel landsman's style. He had no overcoat on, and he did not seem to mind cold winds any more than a penguin or a stormy petrel does. As I scanned his powerful-looking frame, I envied him his strength, for I had not quite so much as I wished for on that morning. When the train came up, the sailor gentleman got into a saloon carriage, and I soon discovered that he was Captain Gray, of the *Great Britain* steamship, which had arrived from Liverpool on the previous day with her usual complement of five hundred passengers. He seemed to be well known to many of the other gentlemen in the carriage, who shook hands with him, and congratulated him on his having made another speedy voyage to Port Philip, and numerous inquiries were made concerning friends whom the captain had taken to England on his last voyage. I was pleased at the cordiality with which he replied to the various questions, and the kindly interest he seemed to take in his old passengers, as if they were all nearly related to him. When we got out of the carriage at Melbourne, I witnessed another example of the genial disposition of the captain. A young woman, apparently a domestic servant, who was on the platform, curtsied respectfully to him. He seemed at once to recognise her as one of his passengers on a previous voyage, for he stopped and shook hands with her, and said in a kind fatherly tone, "Well, Bridget, I am glad to see you again, my girl. I hope you are still in a good situation, and are getting on comfortably." Of course I

did not stop to overhear the conversation that followed, but I felt a sort of loving regard for the good-natured captain who, popular as he was, did not object to stop and give a few words of cheering counsel to a poor servant-girl. Perhaps I felt more interest in him from the fact that several valued friends of mine voyaged from England in his ship, and I had heard them speak in grateful terms of his gentlemanly kindness, and his watchful seamanship. As I slowly walked away from the railway-station, I fancied that if I had just then the option of exchanging my life-lot with any other man in Australia, it certainly should be with Captain Gray, though he might get the worst of the bargain, for he looked the very picture of health, and a tower of strength, and apparently of robust intellect also—just the sort of man to enjoy life thoroughly. Moreover he was commander of the finest ship that then traded to the colony; and the testimonials that he received each voyage from his passengers, showed how much he was appreciated for his nautical skill as well as for his urbanity of manner; in short, I thought he was the most fortunate man I had seen for a long time, a more popular man than the Premier, or even than the noble Governor of Victoria.

A few months afterwards, I was shocked at reading a telegram in my morning newspaper, of the mysterious death of Captain Gray. He went overboard somewhere off Cape Horn, on his return voyage to Liverpool. While I with peculiarly mournful feelings read the brief report of his untimely end, I recalled to mind my reflections concerning him on that bleak mid-winter morning in Melbourne, when I envied him his physical strength and his apparent enjoyment of life.

The remains of poor Captain Gray are lying in the

depths of the sea, but recollections of his gentlemanly kindness, and of his professional skill and watchfulness, are cherished by many warm hearts to-day in Australia and elsewhere. Though I was only in his company for the short time I have mentioned, I do not forget his pleasant-looking face, or the genial tones of his voice, and I lament his awfully sad fate.

“To live in hearts we leave behind
Is not to die.”

Annie Blake was as gladsome as a bird in spring, when she could throw aside her furs and her wool-lined boots, and appear on deck unburdened by a necessary weight of clothing; and her mother was equally glad of the change of weather. Many cheerless, stormy days and nights had been passed, but there they were at length, speeding along with a smooth sea and sunshine all around them, and with their hearts full of gratitude for Divine protection and guidance thus far on their way homeward. Well was it for them too that they had an experienced guardian in Frank. His forethought saved them from many a cold shiver in the high latitudes, where the sun has not much more heat than the moon, and where everything is damp and clammy, and inclined to mouldiness. He had told them beforehand that it was nipping cold in 60° south latitude, and they had better provide themselves with plenty of thick wrappers as well as sundry warm things to wear under their wraps; and especially to get some thick soled boots and woollen gloves. “Don’t trust to india-rubber goloshes, or your feet will always be as cold as snowballs,” suggested Frank. “If those things keep the damp out in bad weather, which I think is doubtful, they don’t keep out cold; I can tell you that from experience. Take

some stout cloth boots with cork soles inside them, and mind you get them big enough to allow of your wearing two pairs of thick lambswool stockings. That's my advice to you both." They took his advice, and they were afterwards grateful for it, especially so when they saw some of their fellow-passengers, who had been less careful of their outfit, suffering severely with cold feet and hands.

No one but Annie Blake herself knew how variously her love-laden heart was affected each day at noon, when she heard the result of the day's work for the last twenty-four hours ; and how impatient she was to get to the end of the voyage. "Heigho ! only 150 miles yesterday !" she would secretly ejaculate, when a foul wind had retarded the ship's progress ; but when they logged 300 miles or more, as a day's run, how cheerily Annie renewed her calculations in her little private log-book, as to how much farther the ship had to go before she reached her moorings. Annie knew the exact distance to a furlong, for Frank had worked it out for her. Sometimes she felt an impetuous wish that the screw would revolve faster, and she fancied that the stokers were not so active as they should be, or the engineers did not put oil enough on the engines ; and she was always a little dissatisfied if she heard the captain cautiously give the order to haul down or clew up any of the light sails, for she feared the speed of the ship would be decreased. All those peculiar emotions and longings of her loving heart were natural enough, and they have been experienced by many other honest young damsels when voyaging either homeward or outward on a similar tender errand. They are always impatient.

On the sixty-third day from Melbourne the *Great*

Britain entered the Mersey ; and in less than an hour after the cables had rattled through the hawse-holes a message from Frank was flashing along the telegraph wires to apprise Ben of the happy fact that Annie and her mother had arrived in England safe and sound. How Ben's heart did bound with joy when that glad news arrived ! And there were many other hearts outside of his household that soon rejoiced also, for in his overflowing gladness that his best loved earthly treasure was so near to him, he ordered his gardener to send a cartload of fruit to each of the schools in the adjacent village, and ordered his butler to supply every poor cottager in the parish with a pound's worth of groceries and a joint of beef.

As soon as they could get their luggage on shore, Frank and his wife and Annie set off for Sussex, and arrived next morning at Willow Farmhouse, where Mrs. Shorter was born and reared. There they were cordially welcomed by many waiting friends. Mrs. Shorter's mother, though long past threescore years and ten, was a hale old woman ; and her delight at receiving her long absent daughter and grand-daughter, and her new son-in-law, far overran the bounds of moderation. The dear old lady laughed and cried in alternate paroxysms for an hour or more ; but it was all the outpouring of joy which had filled her heart too full. A score of the prettiest children in the village, all clad in their Sunday attire, came, in the afternoon, to present Annie with their gatherings of field flowers, and while she was accepting their rustic offerings, the bells of old Hopley Church rang out a merry peal, which made Mrs. Shorter run into her bedroom "to have a good cry," for they put her in mind of the happy day long ago when she was crowned "Queen of the May" on Hopley Green.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“Let nothing but a face of joy appear :

The man who frowns this day shall lose his head.”

—*Fielding.*

BEN did not spend any time unnecessarily in preparing to start for Sussex after he received Frank's telegram, announcing his arrival in England with his precious charge. Swiftly as express train could carry him, he sped on his way to Willow Farm. But even fifty miles an hour was too slow travelling for him ; so impatient was his love, he fain would have gone faster than ever railway wheels had run before ; nor was he oppressed with nervous dread of the train running off the rails and spoiling him for a merry bridegroom ; he was so much occupied in thinking of dear Annie, that he could not think of himself. By a rather interesting coincidence, he was passing Hopley Church in a cab as the ringers were pealing out their merriest changes as a welcome home to Annie and her mother ; and when he drove up to the old farmhouse, his darling was in the front garden trying on a coronet of wild flowers, which the village children had just presented to her. Ben thought he had never before seen a human being look so fascinating. He leaped from the cab as if he were electrified, and almost before the enraptured maid could cry ‘Oh !’ she was clasped in the arms of her faithful lover.

Such a delectable meeting should be described in more ambrosial phrases than I am able to coin, for I am not a poet, neither have I carefully studied the popular style of expressing the raptures of ardent young lovers. But I can naturally imagine how pleased they both felt, and perhaps I had better leave my readers to picture for themselves the happy scene, which was as tender a demonstration of real affection as ever was known in human experience. Ben spent three days at Willow Farm—days of rural felicity such as he never before enjoyed. I should like to have been there with him and his rustic friends, for I love the simple homeliness of village life in old England. Before leaving Willow Farm to complete his preparations for the coming event, Ben pressed his darling Annie to name an early day for their espousals; and after a little natural diffidence, which all modest maidens exhibit, she blushingly whispered, "Next Monday week!"

It would take a long time to tell of all the joyous demonstrations of the villagers during the ensuing week. Their exuberant feelings took many fanciful shapes; but an extreme willingness to help in some way showed itself above all their eccentricities. Frank was a sort of commander-in-chief in all the out-of-door preparations, and he had an able crew of workers. He soon grew very popular with the honest rustics, and seemed as much at home amongst them as if he had been born and bred in Hopley parish. "A merry old soul was he!" with a heart full of love for everybody, and a head pretty well stored with practical knowledge, and wisdom to guide it and make it useful to all around him. He was a favourite with both old and young, for he would play with the little children as briskly as a boy, or he would cheer their fathers and mothers and grandmothers by his happy,

genial humour or by his timely Christian counsel. He was always welcome to their humble dwellings.

One afternoon a party of merry village girls, emboldened by the presence of Mrs. Shorter and Annie, and perhaps prompted by them, lured Frank into a hop garden, and before he was aware of their playful object, they tossed him into a large hop bin, and rolled him over and over in the new hops till he sneezed like a young snuff-taker. Nor would the girls let him get out until he agreed to tell them one of his funny sea stories. He had entertained some of the young children the day before with a few amusing incidents of his experience abroad, and they spread his fame as a story-teller through their respective circles of influence. After getting his clothes properly dusted, Frank sat down under the clustering hop-poles, and the girls gathered around him to hear his story; so he gave them some useful advice in the form of a nautical allegory, making it simple enough to be intelligible to them all. I cannot give his address exactly, for there was no reporter present; but I may boldly say that it was infinitely more worthy of being reported than many speeches of public men which I have seen in print of late years—speeches full of infidelity, sedition, and all uncharitableness. Happy would it be for old England and her colonies if all her influential men had as much real wisdom and honesty of purpose as that rough-spun British sailor.

Frank told the listening maidens how they should ballast their minds with useful knowledge, and keep their standing rigging well set up, and all their running gear in good order, and keep a taut leech on their sails; and he made them understand the meaning of his nautical figures. He told them they were to keep a constant look-out for the rocks and shoals of sin, which thickly

stud the sea of life ; and for the squalls of temptation and the tempests of passion. He also warned them against piratical cruisers ; and graphically described some of the deceitful rogues who, he said, would steal their innocent hearts away and then break them as coolly as a jack monkey would steal a peach or crack a nut. He specially advised his young listeners to study the Bible (which he called the universal chart) with diligence, and always to keep their eyes on their compass card (faith) while steering their bark on life's dangerous voyage ; and above all to take Christ for their pilot, and He would surely guide them at last into the smooth haven of eternal rest.

Some of the girls were moved to tears at Frank's address, and they all seemed to be more or less influenced by it ; for though it was rather humorous in some parts, it was full of wholesome meaning, and they all enjoyed it ; perhaps no one more so than Mrs. Shorter, who afterwards told Frank that she thought it was almost as good as a sermon.

Never since the days when Willow Farm was a wild wood, full of free and naked Britons, was heard such a buzz of jocund voices in its vicinity, and never were there such active movements about the homestead, as took place for the few days prior to the wedding. Nearly all the cottagers around seemed to think it was a personal honour that a farmer's grand-daughter, born in their parish, should be going to be married to a very rich gentleman, and to live in a fine house three times bigger than the rectory. Frank had received general instructions from Ben, and acting upon them, he set to work immediately after his friend's departure. In the first place, he saw the church ringers, and told them that he had sent to London for a coil of new manilla rope, as he

had noticed on his visit to the belfry that most of the bell ropes were stranded, so they were not to be trusted to ring out a merry marriage peal. He also said he had ordered a new union-jack, to be hoisted on the flag-pole of the church tower on the wedding-day, if the Vicar kindly permitted it. Frank was too consistent to give to others what he dared not use himself, so instead of providing grog for the ringers, he promised each man a suit of new clothes. He next enlisted all the able lads of the village to help him rig up several triumphal arches, between the church and Willow Farmhouse, and to each lad he promised a new holiday suit, a pocket-knife, and a brass jew's-harp.

Mrs. Shorter was also busy in directing the operations of the girls of the village in floral decorations of the homestead ; and to each lass she presented a new white frock, a new hat smartly trimmed, and a handsome waist ribbon. All the poor old men in the parish were supplied with new smock-frocks or coats, whichever they preferred, and new hats; and all the women with print dresses and straw bonnets. All the children were also supplied with something new; and in order that every villager should partake of the festivities of the day, arrangements were made for furnishing each needy household with a joint of beef and materials for a plum-pudding; also a pound of tea and a proportionate allowance of sugar.

"I am afraid we shall spend too much money, dear, and Mr. Marshall will be dissatisfied with us," remarked Mrs. Shorter to her husband, one evening, when they had roughly calculated the cost of their liberal disbursement up to that period. "I had no idea we had spent so much."

"Ha, ha! didn't I tell you I knew how to make

money fly?" said Frank merrily. "But don't be afraid, lovey! Ben told me to try to make everybody happy on his wedding-day, and if it costs five times as much as we calculate, he won't grumble. Not he, indeed! he is too generous for that. He has oceans of money, and what is better still, a kind, unselfish heart, and a disposition to do all the good he can with his riches. Long life to the dear fellow! Ha, ha! fire away with your sovereigns, Kitty! I have some shot in the locker yet, and when it runs out I can write to Mr. Mead for more. Those were my orders, and I'll obey them as rigidly as if they were issued by a commodore. Hurrah! I should like to be in such a glorious engagement as this till I am a hundred years old! Wouldn't I scare a lot of want and misery out of the world! There shouldn't be a sad heart, or a poverty-stricken home, within hail of me if I could help it."

"Can it be possible that my wedding-day is come at last? Is it true that the hours of my dreary bachelorhood are numbered, and that I am to begin a new life of wedded bliss? I can scarcely realize the happy fact, which I have dreamt of so often."

Those were Ben's first ejaculations when he opened his eyes at peep of day on the auspicious morning which he had so long and fondly anticipated. He had arrived at Willow Farm on the previous night, with his grandmother and his sister. But if his doubts about his happy position were real, they were soon dispelled, for just as the first tinges of the rising sun peered through the ivy into his bedroom window, he heard the shrieks of a fiddle in the agonies of tuning. He sprang from his bed, and on looking out on to the grassy lawn in front, he saw about thirty lads and lasses, headed by old Mr. Rosinby,

the leader of the church choir and village poet. After a little preliminary arrangement, the company struck up an original song, composed by their leader, the two first lines of which were :—

“Ye lovers true, be blithe and gay, because it is your wedding-day !
Get up and see the sun arise ; there’s not a cloud upon the skies.”

The second line of the song would not have come in well if the morning had turned out wet ; but Mr. Rosinby made his verses in hopes of fine weather, and he was not disappointed. When the song was ended, Ben opened his casement window and acknowledged the compliment by a few brief remarks, which he emphasized by throwing down a purse with ten sovereigns in it. The proud poet took up the purse as a reward of merit, and then marched off with his fiddle under his arm, followed by his more humble associates, to whom, however, he gave a reasonable share of the prize money, but the praise was all his own.

I should like to furnish, with becoming accuracy, a report of all the proceedings on the eventful day ; but as that is impracticable, I merely state the bare fact that the happy pair were united at Hopley Church by the venerable pastor who had married Annie’s parents and baptized her in her infancy. As the bridal party left the sacred edifice, the ringers manned their new bell-ropes and pealed out such a stunning triple bob-major that Mr. Pewsey, the churchwarden, trembled lest they should shake down the old tower and damage the church roof.

The pathway from the church to Willow Farmhouse was strewn with roses and other bright flowers by the school-children, who had been granted a holiday. There was a goodly assemblage of the relatives and intimate

friends of the bride, and a few of Ben's friends—including grandmother, of course. The Vicar of the parish was also present at the breakfast, and a real festive gathering it was. Frank's happy face looked as beaming as a harvest moon, and his merry humour kept everybody in good spirits. His speech, too, was considered the best of all—not excepting the Vicar's; at any rate, it was more applauded, for there was plenty of honest fun in it, and that is usually more acceptable than solemn talk on festive occasions. After the breakfast was over, the company retired to the great parlour, where the harmless merriment was continued. Some of the frolicsome young bridesmaids tried to coax Frank to make another speech, but failing in that, they insisted on his singing; so he sang that fine old song, "Over many lands I've been, many changes I have seen." An *encore* being loudly demanded, he sang "The death of Nelson." Mrs. Shorter seemed quite pleased at her husband's vocal efforts.

At four o'clock the bridal pair got into a carriage and drove off for Ramsgate, amid the loud hurrahs of the assembled villagers, all of whom heartily wished long life and prosperity to "the young squire and his wife." Soon afterwards the party in the parlour broke up, when Frank and his wife, and Mr. Mosely and Edith, with the Vicar and other friends, walked to Hopley Green, to see the children of the parish enjoying the treat which had been liberally provided for them. The two rejoicing grandmothers remained indoors, to talk of the virtues of their respective children and grandchildren, and also to tell each other all the particulars of their own wedding-days, when they were girls—long, long ago.

The wedding presents were tastefully arranged in a little room off the breakfast parlour. If not so varied as

such displays are sometimes, most of the presents were useful, and one, which I shall describe presently, was of a very extraordinary design. I read the following humorous paragraph in the London *Daily Telegraph* some time ago, and I think I need not scruple to make use of it here :—

“Among the wedding gifts recently offered to a fair young New York bride, was one fraught with strange and significant purpose. It was an ordinary sweeping broom, provided with a long, stout handle, to which was tied with a strip of white satin ribbon a visiting card, bearing the name and address of the donor (a married lady and intimate friend of the *fiancée's* family), as well as the following instructive memorandum: ‘Accept this trifling present, and permit me to offer you a suggestion, the fruit of my own matrimonial experiences, as to how you may utilise it to the greatest advantage. So long as the heaven of your wedded life shall remain calm and cloudless, sweep your carpets with the lower end of my gift. Thus they shall be kept spotless and you healthily employed. But on the first symptom of domestic rough weather, reverse the broom and make use of its upper end with unflinching vigour. Thus shall you avert the threatening storm, and re-establish conjugal tranquillity upon a firm and enduring basis.’ ”

If the witty American lady's gift was not suggestive of a strikingly new use for a broom, as a domestic tool, the article itself certainly was a novel addition to a young bride's collection of wedding presents. It has suggested to me that I might briefly notice Frank Shorter's very novel gift to Annie, and which figured prominently among her other bridal treasures. It was of Frank's own designing, though not entirely his own handiwork, for he had help from a clever young mechanic in the

village. It comprised the model of a ship's capstan,* cut out of a block of cedar, and cleverly carved on the top. Around the barrel of the capstan was wound a silken cord (a miniature hawser or towing rope), with a golden clasp at the end of it. The capstan bars or levers were of polished oak, and on each bar the word LOVE was written in gilt letters. It was explained, in a few graphic sentences of Frank's own writing and composition, that the whole affair was meant to be emblematical of the softly drawing power of a wife's influence. The machine was to be set up in the main porch of Newby Hall, and love was to be the figurative lever which turned it and wound the silken cord with the golden clasp, which would at any time draw wandering Ben back to his home. There certainly was original poetry in Frank's conception, although he omitted to suggest a practical use for the oaken capstan bars, after the American lady's idea of reversing the broom; his poetic fancy could not stretch so far as that.

Few of the invited guests to a wedding banquet think much about the toil and skill that was expended in the preparation of the *menu*, and perhaps fewer still bestow a thought on the less pleasing labour of clearing away the *débris* of the feast; yet that work has to be done. Grandmother Bruce was a volunteer in the clearing-up task, but she did not seem to enjoy it at all. She was uncommonly quiet, and her face occasionally looked as woeful as if she were raking up the cinders from the burning ruins of her old treasured home. Her depression was a mystery even to herself, for she could not doubt that her dear Ben had made a happy match.

* A capstan is a vertical windlass, usually erected on the main decks of large ships.

Perhaps her extra rich diet was to blame—goose and wedding-cake do make folks moody sometimes.

Triumphal arches are never so substantial as railway bridges, though they may look ever so much more picturesque or gaudy. They are creatures of a day—their glories are as ephemeral as fireworks. Frank had obtained permission from the village authorities to erect sundry triumphal arches in the main thoroughfares, on the condition that he removed them the day after the wedding. It was urged that country horses were not used to seeing such grand things, and they would naturally try to run away from them, to the risk of life and limb. Accordingly Frank summoned again his staff of young village lads at daybreak, and began the work of demolition. Before dinner time the much admired arches were wholly removed, and there was nothing to be seen along the roadway from Willow Farmhouse to the church door, to mark the recent auspicious event, save here and there a foot-trodden rose, which was too much crushed and begrimed to be picked up by any of the young village maidens and treasured as a *souvenir* or memento of the most popular wedding that had ever taken place in Hopley parish.

Three days afterwards, Grandmother Bruce and Edith and Mr. Mosely returned to Newby Hall. Frank and his wife stayed at Willow Farm.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"She was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
Which terminated all."

—*Byron.*

AFTER a most agreeable stay of three weeks at Rams-gate, Ben and his wife returned to their home, and met with a pleasing reception. Annie was delighted with Newby Hall and its surroundings, which were more beautiful even than her fervid imagination had pictured; and for a while she could hardly realize that it was indeed her own home. She felt a peculiar diffidence in taking her position as mistress over a necessarily large domestic staff; but by degrees she gained more confidence. Most of the servants had been in the family for years, and were well trained by the late Mrs Marshall, so they knew their duties, and Annie had comparatively little trouble with them. From the inkling I have given of her gentle disposition, it may be supposed that she did not assume any consequential airs which would have been offensive to the servants; on the contrary, her demeanour was marked by a modest dignity, and a kindly consideration for all her household. Servants of the right sort know how to appreciate such treatment from a mistress or a master, and they seldom abuse real kindness by unbecoming freedom.

The Rev. Mr. Mosely continued to live at the Hall, and was much respected by the whole household; indeed, grandmother's esteem almost amounted to extreme veneration. She thought that he had been providentially sent just at the right time, like a messenger of love, to comfort them all. He seemed to take a kindly interest in all their affairs, and was a sort of counsellor-general. He had a cultured mind, and a nice entertaining way of imparting his stores of knowledge to others, without assuming that he knew more than they did. He was usually cheerful, and sometimes exuberantly merry. Grandmother declared one day to Edith, that to hear dear Ben and the curate laughing together, like happy twin-brothers, touched her heart more affectingly than the strains of the grand organ in the Crystal Palace had ever done. He had a fine musical taste, and played the piano moderately well. He was popular as a preacher and a lecturer; and when he took a service in the parish church, at the request of his friend the Rector, there was usually a full congregation. He was also fond of athletic sports of a harmless kind, and was the patron of a cricket club, formed by some of the youths of the parish. He excelled as an archer, and also as a skater; but horse riding was his favourite exercise. He taught Edith to ride. Ben made fair progress under the tuition of Mr. Mosely, but he found the first six months a season of hard drudgery; and but for the encouraging counsel of his tutor, he would have thrown up his duties, as impatiently as a young colt kicks off a pack-saddle. He was afterwards glad that he had manfully persevered with them, for they became easier by degrees.

While the curate was attending assiduously to the mental training of his adult pupil, he was quietly pur-

suing the study of a most popular branch of natural philosophy, on his own private account. I daresay the astute reader has anticipated as much. It would be almost as unnatural for a young lady and gentleman, so alike in tastes and refined manners as Edith and the curate, to live in a house together for a year or more without becoming fondly attached, as it would be for a lot of schoolboys to sit in a cherry orchard with their hands in their pockets. To tell, in a tender way, all about the budding and blossoming and ripening of their mutual affection, would be as interesting and soothing to my mental senses, as softly gliding in a sedan-chair through a beautiful flower garden, or a grand picture exhibition; but it would be necessarily a lengthy report, and I cannot afford space for it. I will simply say, in ancient prose—they loved one another. After the usual experience of heart-flutterings between hopes and fears and indecision, which most young men know something of, Mr. Mosely declared his love, in becoming style, and was accepted as the affianced suitor of Edith, with the cordial assent of the whole family. When that compact was settled, Mr. Mosely's name was familiarised to Fred, and he became a recognised member of the inner social circle, with all its privileges.

It is generally admitted that courting-time is a very joyous one, and yet how often we see young lovers impatient for those halcyon days to end! Curious anomaly! Possibly Edith and Fred might have shown unusual patience in that way if they had been fairly tried; but it so happened that the Rector became unable to attend to his sacred duties through infirmity, so Fred was chosen to officiate for him, *pro tem*. It soon, however, led to his being offered the living and the parsonage house, with the hearty sanction of the Rector. Such

an opening for usefulness was not to be slighted, and Fred accepted it joyfully. Of course, he could not be expected to live in a parsonage all alone, like a hermit; so Edith, with characteristic charity, agreed to go and keep him company—to be his travelling companion for the journey of life. Their wedding festivities were on a quiet scale; but were perhaps not less enjoyable to them than if all their parishioners had been present. After a few weeks' delightful sojourn in Edinburgh, and in some of the environs of that beautiful city, they returned to their parsonage, which was one of the most picturesque retreats in rural England. Grandmother playfully remarked to Ben, after her first visit to the bride and bridegroom, that they looked as chirpy and cosy as two young linnets in a sweetbriar bush.

The marriage of Edith with the clergyman of the parish had a softening influence on the feelings of the gentry around, in favour of her brother and his wife, and overtures of friendship were more numerous than Ben found it expedient to encourage; for a quiet life was more to his taste than fashionable gaiety. Some very useful designs of a philanthropic character were engaging his leisure hours, though he continued to persevere in his educational studies, in which he received occasional help from his good brother-in-law. Several minor posts of honour were offered to Ben in the county, but he considered that it would be wiser economy of his time to perfect his education, as far as practicable, and thus better fit himself to fill any public office that he might, by-and-by, see it his bounden duty to accept. He rightly acknowledged that wealth and position have their responsibilities and imperative obligations which no man can honourably evade.

After Ben's wedding, Mr. and Mrs. Shorter made a

reasonably long stay at Willow Farm ; they then went to Newby Hall to spend a few weeks, prior to going to London to begin housekeeping on their own account. During the quieter intervals of his holiday time, Frank had been turning over certain plans and projects in his mind for his future operations. He resolved, first of all, to go up for his examination as master mariner ; and then to buy a small vessel for the Mediterranean trade, and sail her himself. One evening, soon after his arrival at the Hall, Ben and he were sitting in the library together, and he was explaining all his plans to his good friend, who listened with genuine interest. He argued that, although he and his wife might manage to live well enough in a humble way on their means, it was not right or safe for a man who had strength to work to remain inactive ; and it was reasonable to expect a man to get on most prosperously with the sort of work that he understood best. "Every man to his calling," as the ship's butcher said when they asked him to lend a hand to furl the flying-jib. "Depend on it, Ben, the devil has ten times a better chance to get to windward of an idle fellow than he has of one who is actively employed."

"Yes, that is a well-established fact, Frank. Poet Cowper says :

" 'An idler's like a watch that has no hands,
As useless when it goes as when it stands.'"

But there is no danger of you getting lazy and useless. You have explained your plans to me, and I think they are very feasible ; but even good plans, it is said, should be made to give way to better ones. I have been thinking of your affairs for months past, and have designed some profitable work for you on shore."

"Ha, ha! I should be about as handy on shore as a working bullock would be on a ship's deck," said Frank. "What useful landsman's work could I turn my hand to, I'd like to know?"

"I am just going to tell you, so listen patiently. But first of all let me explain, that my solicitor has bought an annuity of £300, on the joint lives of yourself and your dear wife. That will be enough to keep you comfortably on shore. Stay, Frank! don't interrupt me again till you have heard what I have to say. It is no use for you to say you won't accept it, for the contract is made, so neither of us can alter it now. I consider it is the least I can do for you after all the help you have afforded me, in various ways. Come, don't be obstinate, there's a good fellow! Hearken, while I suggest some useful employment for you, that I have been thinking of very carefully. You say you want to be at work, and you will surely find plenty to do if you agree to my proposal, which is that you should go out as a missionary to——"

"A missionary!" interposed Frank, in amazement.

"Yes, a missionary to the sailors about the docks and back streets of London. No man knows better than you do the perilous temptations which specially beset poor seamen, so you can sympathise and advise with them, perhaps more effectively than a clergyman could."

"Are you really in earnest, Mr. Marshall?"

"Thoroughly so, Frank. The idea suggested itself to me after hearing of some of the happy effects of your simple discourse to those young village girls in the hop-grounds. You remember it. It has occurred to me that if you had a sort of roving commission to go about doing good, you may find many persons willing to listen to you who would perhaps sheer off if a

minister were to hail them. If you should be the means of rescuing even one poor mortal from the downward road to ruin, it will be a more profitable use of your time than if you were to go to sea and earn money enough to build a small fleet of ships of your own. But I believe you may benefit hundreds, perhaps thousands, who are now staggering their way to the grave, ignorant and heedless of what will befall them in the life beyond. I should like you also to carry a little money in your pocket to lay out for me, whenever you meet with cases of real distress in your daily rambles. Briefly, that is the life-work I propose for you, Frank. Are you willing to go at it?"

"Ay, ay, Ben; I'm willing to do anything that you may cut out for me, on sea or on shore, in all weathers; but am I able for this missionary work? that's the point."

"Of yourself you can do nothing. You have often admitted that to me; but you know whom to apply to for help and wisdom and guidance," said Ben reverently.

"That's true, I was forgetting my sheet anchor for a minute. Paul said, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me'; and in reliance on the same almighty strength and help, I can do wonders. I am ready to go to work as soon as you like; and I shall never be weary of telling what the Lord has done for me. Yo ho! shipmates ahoy!" added Frank, in his quarter-deck tones, as he started to his feet, "Shipmates ahoy! haul in your weather main-braces, and heave to! I am coming on board to pilot you all into the smooth waters of salvation! Oh, Ben! I feel as happy as a man-o'-war commander who has just released hundreds of poor negroes from the hold of a slave ship. Give me your hand! I accept your plan with all my heart."

A long discussion on ways and means ensued. Ben suggested that Frank should offer his services to the committee of the "Missions to Seamen". (*see* Appendix), which is doing such a noble work in London and elsewhere ; but Frank would not consent to that. He said it would be presumptuous for him to volunteer for work of which he had no experience, and he might only be getting in the way of a better man. An old soldier might as well apply for a berth as captain of a mail steamer. He would rather go about the docks and streets on his own account, as a sort of gleaner in the great harvest-field. He would be careful not to interfere with the work of the regularly appointed missionaries, but no doubt he would find a few needy fellows, now and then, whom he could help with a few cheering words or a shilling or two.

Two days afterwards Frank went to London, and began his work of benevolence, and his good wife encouraged him in every way in her power. He kept a diary—or log, as he called it—which he occasionally sent to his good friend Ben, at Newby Hall, who continued to take a lively interest in Frank's work. Though the diary was written with modest brevity, it showed that its owner had been pretty constantly employed, and that his heart was in his work. Frank soon became as well known about some of the docks in London as the late Rev. Nathaniel Pidgeon, or the late Mr. Stephen Robens, were known a few years ago about "The Rocks," in Sydney. Many poor wandering sailors and others have had good cause to be grateful for the Christian counsel and material help they received from honest Frank Shorter. When he died there were many real mourners at his funeral from the waifs and strays of the streets. In accordance with his dying wish, his wife,

with unvarying punctuality and Christian zeal, continued, as long as she lived, to carry on a gratuitous Sunday breakfast for the poor, which her beloved husband had initiated, and which she had always helped him to manage. She was a help-mate indeed!

Widow Bruce continued to live in her old house for several years; and, as she had no shop to mind, she used to employ herself in visiting the sick and afflicted in the neighbourhood. Ben kept her liberally supplied with pocket money, so she was able to dispense material comforts, as well as religious consolation and instruction, to many poor families, and she became quite influential and popular, especially with the children, who used among themselves to call her reticule "the lucky bag." No reasoning could induce her to give up her old home in Back Street, though she used to visit Newby Hall every year and stay a few weeks. She died in the same room that her dear lamented daughter died in, and she was buried beside her daughter's grave. The dear old lady was well prepared for death, so there can be no doubt that she has joined her lost ones in heaven.

During his grandmother's illness which preceded her death, Ben often visited her at her home. The inhabitants of Back Street did not show any desire to molest him in any way; on the contrary, they treated him with marked respect or deference. Perhaps some of the old grumblers whispered together, as he passed down the street, that they knew him when he was not worth a shilling, for that is the way of the world, but as their gossip did not reach his ears, he was not affected by it. Some of the needy ones had good cause to be grateful for his kindly help; and he also placed many poor boys and girls into positions for making their way up in life. He also amply provided for Joey Finch. As Mrs.

Bruce's funeral *cortège* passed down Back Street on the way to Hackney Churchyard, there were many weeping eyes looking at it; and one old man, from his doorway, remarked to his next neighbour, "There goes the remains of an honest woman." I had almost omitted to state, that Frank Shorter did not forget the kindness of his good friend Captain Harden; and through Ben's help, he made a comfortable provision for the captain and his wife as long as they lived.

It was some months before Ben ventured to look at the mysterious manuscript, so often alluded to, but at length he did muster courage to glance through it. It was a sort of autobiography of his late father, and was evidently written with the hope of softening his parents towards him. While he confessed to many wrong doings, which were too patent to be denied, he strove to palliate them; and finally he expressed a determination to reform his life, if he could be assured of the forgiveness of his parents, and be favoured with a little pecuniary help from them. It was a sad history of a wasted life. Alas! there are many such sad histories to be read almost every day in the police courts or in the criminal assize reports.

I shall not attempt the sombre task of explaining the whole of the manuscript. The tin box contained foreign bonds to the value of nine thousand pounds, which young Marshall had stolen from his father. In order to negotiate them it was necessary to add forgery to theft. He had done so to some extent, but dreading detection, he buried the box containing the remainder of the bonds in Fitzroy Gardens. From a private source Ben subsequently learnt more particulars of his unhappy father's career than his own writing divulged. It appeared that after leaving California, he, under an

assumed name, visited several of the gold-diggings in Victoria ; but his occupation was gambling rather than digging for honest gold, and his life was one of reckless dissipation. In his manuscript he confessed to having sadly misbehaved himself at Ballarat in a season of weakness. What that particular misbehaviour was need not be specified ; but the law called it by a harsher name, and detective officers were set on the track of the felon, who, if found, would probably have been hanged. To escape them Marshall tramped overland to Sydney, and endured many privations and trials by the way, which he graphically described. In his earlier manhood he had kept a fine yacht at Southampton, so he knew enough of seamanship to hire as ordinary seaman on board the *Wolf*. The rest of his miserable history is known to the reader. "The way of transgressors is hard."

One day Ben and his sister were gazing fondly on the portrait of their late lamented grandmother, in the picture gallery at Newby Hall, and talking, as they often did, of her amiable qualities. They did not often look at the next portrait, which was that of their father, and had been hung there at his mother's request. But on that day Edith happened to glance at it, and she remarked to Ben, in a subdued tone, "I never observed that peculiar writing before, did you, dear?"

Ben looked attentively at a scrawly sentence at the foot of the picture, and then he said : "I never noticed it before, love. Perhaps Fred wrote it ; but it does not look like his writing. I'll go and ask him ; he is in the library."

Mr. Mosely said he had not written anything on the picture, nor had he seen the writing before. The ser-

vants were closely questioned on the subject, but each one denied all knowledge of it. Who the writer was remained thereafter a mystery, but there was the inscription in black letters, dimly legible, "BURIED IN THE SEA."

THE END.

all 5

APPENDIX.

"MISSIONS TO SEAMEN."


SOME time ago, I received by post a small book, entitled "Lay work in the Merchant Navy." It is published by the committee of the "Missions to Seamen," Buckingham Street, Strand, London. It comprises an excellent essay (written by Captain F. B. Hopkins, of the S.S. *Enmore*), to which the Brassey prize of twenty-five pounds was worthily awarded. The book also comprises another excellent essay (written by Mrs. Ferguson, of the ship *Sultana*). On the page of the latter essay is printed, "The adjudicators of the Brassey prize held this essay to be so admirable, that the Earl of Aberdeen presented the writer with a travelling clock, and the committee of the "Missions to Seamen" decided to publish this paper also, for the information of the officers of the mercantile marine."

I believe I am indebted to an old Australian friend (the captain of a ship) for the little volume, the perusal of which has interested me very much. I can hardly decide which essay I like best until I read them again, but I can most heartily recommend each of them. I hope they will be extensively read, and that they will induce an increased practical sympathy with the good cause of Seamen's Missions.

As I stood for a few minutes lately on the paved space in front of the Royal Exchange, London, my memory recalled the frosty morning, in the days of my youth, forty-seven years ago, when I stood somewhere about the same spot and gazed at the smoking ruins of

the old Exchange building, which had been destroyed by fire on the previous night. My mind seemed to roll back through the intervening years, and over more than a hundred thousand miles of ocean that I had traversed, and I reflected how very much I was indebted to the skill and bravery of seamen, that I stood there a living man, reading, with reverential pride, the motto or sacred text which the merchants of the great city of London have inscribed on the façade of their Exchange building, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." I wished it were practicable for me to say a few kindly words, which would reach the hearts of the shipowners and underwriters, who do business beneath that roof all the year round—to tell them some of my varied experiences of life on shipboard, or express merely a few of my practical ideas on the general interests of seamen. I do believe that my words would in some degree be helpful to "Poor Jack," in inducing more care for his social comforts and for his religious privileges when at sea.

I am very thankful to be able to testify, from personal knowledge, that there are many good captains afloat, who are as earnest for the religious and social welfare of their men as the writer of essay Number One, and some good women afloat too, as kindly zealous for seamen's best interests as the writer of essay Number Two. May their numbers increase! Oh, that every ship sailing out of our English ports, all the world over, had men or women on board who by their lives confess that "The earth is the Lord's," and who gladly show the "side-lights" of Christianity wherever they go! Then the glorious, promised time would soon dawn, when "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 376 156 6

